





L. 6.

MÉLINITE

THE LADY'S MAID

By

ADOLPH BELOT

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MOPPEL



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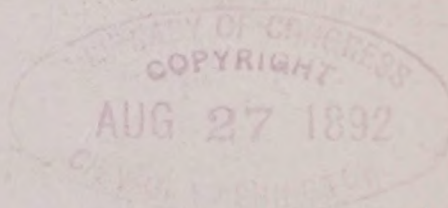
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Etc., Etc.

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MÉLINITE.

I.

Duchess :

I have decided to write that to you which I dare not speak : I love you with my whole soul. Will you do me the great honor of granting me your hand, the supreme happiness of permitting me to unite my destiny with your own ?

I am with respect, Duchess,

Your devoted servant,

HENRI DE T. . . .

Prince :

Your request is most improper. When a man like yourself wishes to espouse a woman like myself, he chooses a relation, an ally, or a friend, and requests him to go, in his place, to present his humble request. But I do not wish to believe that you have willingly been thus wanting in the laws of etiquette. It appears to me, rather, that you have lost your head a little in these latter days,

and also that, without being well acquainted with me. . . . I will repeat it . . . you have some idea of my character. In truth, I hate the conventions of society, its established regulations, its ceremonial, its pomp, and I think it preferable to attend to one's own affairs, without the interference of others.

What could I have said to your ambassador? "The request of the prince flatters me greatly, and I willingly believe that the hand that he solicits would be well placed in his own. We are equal in our birth, our rank in the world, our connections, our attachments, nearly so in our parents. I shall lose nothing in changing my name and titles for those that he will give me. Our fortunes are equal, and are sufficiently large not to regard a few million francs. I am twenty-eight years of age, he is thirty-five. The digression is reasonable. With a grand air, a handsome countenance, with health, and courage that has been often proved. With enough faults not to be perfect, which would be an imperfection and a vice in my eyes. Of high intelligence, and large ideas in all things; of artistic tastes—even an artist himself; like myself, of an independent character, he is aware that his high position places him a little above the world's rules, and enables him to act in that

fashion which he thinks proper. In short, Monsieur the Ambassador, the Prince 'Charming,'—let us say charming, for it does not compromise me, — whose hand you have just offered me, would suit me in every way, if I had decided to marry again, but I hesitate, I require reflection."

This is what I should have replied to your envoy, if you had sent one. With you, who address yourself directly to me, I shall have less reserve, and I will tell you the truth. "I have reflected. Widowhood is good, but it gives too much liberty to a woman. She uses it sometimes, without discretion, and perhaps would do better if she was held at the end of a chain. You offer to hold this little chain, and the idea does not displease me. I have studied you well, and believe I know you, and that you would hold it so lightly, that I should imagine that you wore it yourself. But, if I know you, you are are not acquainted with me . . . No, I assure you, you only know what is commonly said of me. I am tall and slender. I have marvelous shoulders, a divine waist, the carriage of a queen, so the journals say that are indiscreet enough to occupy themselves with my person. I am fair, a clear blonde, so rare that it is difficult to find one like me; with arched eyebrows, deep blue eyes, with a changing expression, by turns

imperious, caressing, quiet, lively, pensive or curious; with a nose, a mouth, an ear, a hand, a foot which can never be seen again—the mold is broken. This is what my biographers say of me. One has dared to say I am more beautiful than Marie Antoinette; others have compared me to the huntress Diana, but a more human and womanly goddess than she was. A few say I am incomparable, and they are the least foolish. Passing from my physical to my mental qualities, they find me most intelligent, very original, and—this is what spoils it—curious, oh! curious to excess in all things, even in those that it would be much better to ignore, some women insinuate, who ignore nothing. But no one knows when my curiosity stops. Is it passive? Does it suffice me to interrogate, to listen, or to look? Is it active? Do I pretend to be acquainted with the sentiments, to have felt the sensations, the existence of which my curiosity has taught me.”

Here, my prince, is that of which you are completely ignorant, and it is this that you should know before uniting your destiny to mine. To use your own expression: I do not believe that secrets should exist between people like ourselves, who would marry in full liberty, without being constrained by any one or any thing, but simply

because I please you, and you do not displease me.

How can I instruct you ? Shall I tell you, in a private interview, a certain chapter in my life, a certain recent adventure of which no one knows, and which paints me as I am, which shows the curiosity with which I am reproached, and the audacity which no one knows of, but which I avow to you ? No, I dare not do it. The adventure is too shameful to be told in words. But, for a long time past, I have kept a diary, or journal, in which I have recorded my actions and my thoughts ; I have been in the habit of talking every evening with myself, and of reproducing my gossip, which has often followed from conversations that I have just had with this one or that, when it merited the trouble of thus preserving it. It has always amused me to play at being a dramatic author ; I should have wished to be Sardou, if I were not myself. To-day, these records, of one or several personages, will allow me to tell you all, without saying anything, to inform you of my worth, or more likely to lower myself in your eyes. I have detached from the book the leaves in which the adventure in question is related, and I confide them to your loyalty. If, after having read them, your wishes remain unchanged, if you find that your penitent merits absolution, you may yourself

fix, prince, the date of our marriage. But if you say to yourself that I have really gone too far, that I may be tempted to try more adventures of the same nature, to make a new attempt at the impossible, take back your request, and marry yourself to an innocent. With those ideas, you will find her better than

THE DUCHESS OLGA.

To this letter were joined the following pages, which the duchess had detached from her private journal. She gave thus to the Prince de T. the only chapter in her life which she considered deserving of censure, thinking it useless to deliver to him the innocent secrets of her youth. She wished to be judged solely upon her crime, or her offense, and to be acquitted or condemned without taking the benefit of the extenuating circumstances which a study of the remainder of her life would have furnished.

II.

10th June, 188 . . .

A MOST strange and annoying thing has happened to me. I have lost a million. I have not lost it through my own fault, or by the fault of my advisers, through making a bad speculation or a wrong investment. No, I have lost it as one loses a purse or a handkerchief. It is impossible to find it. I do not know where it has gone. It has gone from its place, however, and it was a good size, for it was not a million in bank notes, but a million in bills of all sorts, of all colors, of every form; bonds, deeds, and documents payable to the bearer, unhappily. I have seen the heap, and my notary has also seen it, and even touched it, for he gave himself the trouble, now useless, indeed, of inscribing the numbers of all these deeds in my marriage contract. Some represented a portion of that which was brought me by the duke, and the others a fraction of my marriage settlement. The whole belonged to us both, since we were married under the regulation of an equal division of properties. It is not only that they

cannot be found, but a paper, a note left by my husband, indicates that they have been deposited by him somewhere. At first I asked myself if the million had not been employed in buying houses or land. But, in that case, the new title to the property would have been found, as all the others were found, well arranged, catalogued, with notes to that effect attached. The duke was methodical; he was neither prodigal nor a spendthrift. . . . It is in consequence of this that my notary cannot understand it, and has lost his wits in the matter. It is useless to lose mine also. I will close my journal, and go to bed.

11th June.

I have slept badly. This matter has tormented me all night. A good sign, in my opinion. It is a proof that I am not losing my wits, as is my notary.

It is not a question of the money that engrosses me. I have always lived so grandly; all my caprices have been satisfied since my infancy, with so much good grace that I do not know the value of money. I do not attach to these questions the importance that others, less fortunate than myself, should and are obliged to attach to them. But a curiosity, from which I cannot escape, possesses me to find out where this million has gone.

At the same time I dread to learn. . . . Yes, a vague fear is in my mind, seizes my heart. I ask myself at times if the disappearance of all the deeds is not connected with the unexpected, strange death of my husband. He had always enjoyed good health, never an ailment, an illness. It was only for a few weeks I found him preoccupied, sad, a little dull. Often he appeared not to listen to me when I spoke. His thoughts were not with me. I felt uneasy, and asked him the reason. He told me it was nothing, absolutely nothing. But one day—he evidently lacked the courage to dissimulate longer—he complained of extreme weariness in his body, of violent pains in his head. I sent for our doctor, more than a doctor—a professor. He questioned him, sounded him, and finished by declaring it was nothing serious, that he was nervous. The nerves, always the nerves! In our days the doctors, both great and little, powerless to understand certain maladies, refer everything to the nerves and throw everything on them.

I looked after the duke as much as if his illness had been serious. I did not leave him for an instant. He was always excited, agitated. I recollect he often started. He took me by the hand, and said to me, quickly: “Pardon, pardon!” I

thought then that he wished to say : "Pardon for the trouble I am giving you, for your fatigue." This day I asked him if these words had another meaning.

After two nights passed in his room, upon a couch, as he prayed me to go to my room and take some rest, I ended by consenting. Oh ! I shall reproach myself all my life. I had slept about an hour when the report of a firearm awoke me with a start. I jumped up. I ran to the duke. . . . He was dead. Whilst I slept, unhappy being that I am, he rose from his bed, took from his desk a revolver he kept there, and shot himself.

Why this suicide ? The doctors attributed it to delirium, caused by an idiopathic injury of the cerebral functions. It is well named. I wrote it so when I was able, after a considerable period, to take up my journal again.

And this explanation has satisfied me until now. But now. . . . Yes, this absent million always besets me. . . . It is stronger than I. I cannot help it. I cannot avoid placing certain things together. . . . What folly ! Admitting that the duke had gambled, lost, squandered this sum, would it have affected him to that extent ? It represented scarcely eighteen months rent. . . .

Never mind, nothing will make me give it up ;

there is some mystery, and I would give much to penetrate it. Is it not natural that I should wish to clear up, in all its details, the death of my husband, and the events which have caused it? Ought I to attribute it to a physical or moral cause? Who would be able to inform me? No one. . . . Yes; some one, perhaps. The Marquis de B, the intimate friend of the duke. They were comrades at school and at college, companions in their pleasures, and nothing has ever altered their confidence in each other, their mutual devotion. My marriage rendered their friendship less close, but did not break it off. They have continued to meet here and elsewhere, without my having thought of taking umbrage at their intimacy. . . . Why does the marquis seem to shun me since the death of his friend? Two formal visits, nothing more. Does he fear that I shall question him; that I shall try to wrest some secret from him? . . . Oh! if one exists, I shall know how to compel him. . . . I will write to him, this very evening, that I expect him to morrow.

III.

12th June.

THE marquis has responded to my appeal, though he would have preferred not to do so, and I know his motive now. In place of writing a part of our conversation, I am going to try to reproduce it exactly.

After reproaching him politely for the rarity of his visits, I approached the question that occupied me, lightly, in a cheerful tone, to prevent him putting himself upon his guard.

"My notary," I said, "in making the inventory of the duke's property, has established the disappearance of a large number of bonds payable to bearer. There is reason to believe that these bonds have been stolen since the death of my husband, and Monsieur X. advises me to seek legal redress."

While speaking, I glanced furtively at the marquis, and I thought I perceived that he was slightly troubled. I continued, freely, in the same half serious tone :

"Before deciding to do this, which is always a

troublesome matter, I thought that I ought to seek the advice of some friend. This is why I have allowed myself, my dear marquis, to bring you here from your occupations or your pleasures."

"I thank you, duchess, but I do not see what advice I can give you concerning the bonds in question."

"You do not see ! It is very simple, however. If you have the slightest reason to believe that the duke, whose intimate friend you were, had sold or pledged these deeds, as was his perfect right in his position as chief of our community, tell me so, and it will save me from taking this troublesome step."

M. de B., slightly frowning, thought without a doubt for an evasive answer. I did not give him time to find one, but coming nearer, I added :

"Can you recall to your mind if he made a bad speculation upon the exchange ?"

He hesitated. Perhaps, to get rid of me, to cut short this dangerous conversation, he thought of telling me that my husband had in truth speculated, and lost upon the bourse. But this very pure gentleman had too much respect for himself to tell an untruth. A thing that I was slightly counting upon.

"To my knowledge," said he, at length, timidly,

as if he regretted not being able to say so. "Gontran never speculated on the bourse. It never entered his mind."

"I thought so, but I wished to be sure of it. Let us seek another solution. My husband did not care for cards, nor play habitually, I know well. But men are subject to passing fancies. Do we not read every day in the papers that Messieurs M. M. X . . . or Z . . . have lost in a week, sometimes in a night, considerable sums? Was Gontran seized, with a folly of that kind? I should not respect his memory the less, for I am indulgent to every fault that does not touch one's honor, and you should tell me frankly."

I kept my eyes fixed upon him. He said, after a new hesitation, a new effort:

"No, duchess, I do not believe that Gontran gambled."

"Without the bourse, cards, or horse-racing which he had no passion for, do you see anything else . . . an important purchase, a loan? Think well."

He appeared to think.

"No, I can see nothing," he said, at last.

These words were said in a badly assured voice, as if he had some trouble in pronouncing them. He deceived me then. He was lying against all

his habits. My desire to know the truth was increased. What sentiment dominated me? Curiosity without doubt. An honest curiosity that had in it no unkindness to my husband, as I was certain he had never committed any grave wrong to reproach himself with.

"Then," said I, as if I had finished, "it is evident that the duke did not dispose of these bonds before his death; that we have been robbed of them, and that I ought to follow the advice of my notary."

"Lay a complaint?" he murmured.

"Evidently; do you not judge so? it affects a million."

This statement, strong as it was, did not appear to surprise him. One would have said that he expected it, that he knew it as well as I.

With a tranquil air that did not deceive me, he replied:

"Are you not about to give yourself much trouble for the sake of the money? The police at your house. They will make an inquiry, question your servants . . . then a citation before the judge, new interrogations, long waitings, and then the researches in the banks, your credits, for the judge will certainly say: 'One does not keep at one's house a million in bonds; it is placed some-

where. He with whom it was placed has stolen it without doubt.' And then all Paris is mixed up in your private affairs. The papers seize hold of it, investigate the life of Gontran, even your own. . . . Believe me, duchess, it is better to renounce this complaint that has very little chance of any result."

He had said too much, and with too much animation, considering his habitual coolness. His strong desire to make me renounce this plaint was most apparent.

Again I insisted :

"Yes, all these troubles are in store for me, I know. Nevertheless, I do not believe it right to draw back. Personally, I am able to lose a million ; that affects me only. But it is not allowed me to sacrifice the interests of those that come after me or my heirs."

"You have no children !"

"I have nieces that the duke loved very much ; . . . and another thing, which is of more importance still, I owe it to the memory of my husband to show that he was robbed of this amount."

"I do not understand."

"You do not understand ? If I refuse to make this complaint, to encourage this search, to follow the counsel of my notary, I make it appear that

the duke has been a prodigal, a dissipated man ; who, in spite of his immense revenues, has made away with a million of his capital, and that without my preventing it. You see well, my dear marquis, I must not hesitate, and I hesitate no more."

"You will really make this complaint?" he demanded, much moved.

"Yes, to-day even. What ! after all that I have just told you, you do not approve ?"

"No, duchess."

"Why ? Give me, at least, a good reason."

Pressed thus, he cried, with excitement : "You would do wrong to make some things public . . ."

Then he stopped himself, suddenly, as if he had said too much.

"What things ?" asked I, raising my head, moved this time, as much as himself. "Oh ! take care. You cannot be silent. . . . You owe me an explanation of the words you have just uttered. What are these things it is necessary to hide, that must not be made public ?"

He did not reply. I dared to add :

"Do they touch his honor, then ?"

Then he spoke, and said to me, vehemently :

"No, no ! Gontran has never failed in that."

"I know it well," I cried, in the same voice, with

the same pride. "Then why counsel me to silence, to prevent me having some wretched thief punished?"

"There was no theft. . . . The money was given."

"By Gontran?"

"Yes."

"To whom?"

"I beseech you not to oblige me to say."

"I entreat you to speak. I demand it."

"I have not the right to betray the secret of a friend."

"Yes. To prevent others from knowing it; that we alone may keep it. It is your strict duty, on the contrary."

"If you suffer from this confidence?"

"So much the worse for me. I have wished for it."

And, approaching him, in a low tone, with beating heart, for I had divined:

"He did it for a woman, is it not so?"

His silence told me the truth.

"What woman?" continued I, more angry now than curious. "A woman does not receive a million at first sight."

"It is sometimes at the last," he replied.

From the contemptuous manner in which he

spoke I could not misunderstand him. But an idea had just struck me, and I said quickly :

“The death of my husband was voluntary, is it not so ? He killed himself in his delirium.”

“I do not know.”

“What do you believe ? Do not tell an untruth. We are speaking of the dead.”

“I believe that he was partly conscious, and I love him the better for that.”

“What ! you approve of his killing himself for this woman ?”

“He did not kill himself for her. He killed himself for fear of her.”

“What did he fear ?”

“Of being entangled still more than he had been, of being lured into doing some new folly.”

“Some money folly ?” said I, in a hollow voice. “He would have done better to have lived and ruined me. . . . For he must have loved her, to have such fear ?”

“No, he did not love her.”

“Yes, yes, I know what you would say. Men have their own words, different expressions, when they speak of their amours. They desire ; they do not love. With us women it is the same thing. As for the rest, for a million, he no doubt satisfied

all his desires. If he killed himself, he loved truly. . . . Reply to me, if you can."

"I am not able," he murmured.

I did not remark these words as they strike me now. Did he wish to say, "I am not able to explain certain sentiments," or, well, "There are some things that I cannot speak to you about?" To continue, however, I said to him, in a hard voice: "You have been the intimate friend of my husband. You have been entirely in his confidence. If I ever doubted it, I will doubt it no more. . . . And you have never tried to draw him away from this creature to whom he owes his death."

He replied softly, with lowered head, and moist eyes:

"On the contrary, I always tried to save him from her, but did not succeed."

As he bowed before me, in taking leave, without daring to offer me his hand, I said to him shortly, obeying an idea, which I cannot explain:

"What was her name?"

He hesitated to answer. Then I said:

"Be it so! I will ask some one else. Their loves have been no secret to any one but myself."

"No one, except myself," he replied, "is acquainted with it."

"She hides it, then? It was a woman of the world, married but venal, it would appear."

"No, a courtesan."

"They make no mystery, then, of their liasons, above all when they are paid such a good price; a prodigal lover is an advertisement for them, and they cry his name from the house-tops."

"When they know it," observed the marquis.

"How! She did not know the name . . . of your friend?"

"He never gave it to her. She always knew him under another name."

"And she? You will tell me her name now?"

"If you require it."

"I do require it."

"She is called Mélinite."

"Mélinite! Is that the name of a woman?"

"I do not know her under any other."

"Very well. Thank you. Good-by."

He bowed again, and went out.

IV.

15th June.

THUS, he whom I have preferred to all, because I believed him more loyal, more loving than the others, to whom I have been a devoted and faithful companion, and the only one to whom I have ever given a coquettish look ; he whom I loved as much as I believed him to love me ; this husband, this lover, this friend, tired of me already, in the third year of our marriage, takes a mistress, and kills himself for her, or because of her.

Ah ! it is infamous ! What have I suffered since this revelation ! . . . As much as in his death . . . which has come a second time to me. I suffer in my cruelly wounded pride, in my love, which I believed eternal. I suffer in no longer being able to think of the past. I suffer in despising him whom I respected.

No, no, I am wrong in saying that. He is no more. I ought to forgive him. Pardon him ? I am not able. I could never . . . because he is dead. One sometimes forgives an injury, an offense, when one can reproach a person se-

verely, can strike, and wound in return, can show one's anger, proclaim one's grief. But my anger is poured out on emptiness; my cries are not heard; I am not able to return him the injury he has done me, to say to him: "We are quits now, I forgive you."

However, he loved me, loved me very much. Oh! I am sure of it. I am not mistaken. . . . Why, all at once, did I cease to please him? Has my face changed then? Am I become less beautiful? It is improbable. Some lady friend would have found a means to let me know it. . . . I am inclined to think, on the contrary, that marriage has improved my appearance. I never had such triumphs as during the last year. My entry at a theatre, at a ball, always created a sensation. People waited to see me pass, and the crowd gave utterance to a murmur of admiration. . . . I am compelled to say so, since it is true, and in this journal I tell everything. . . . I must, therefore, write the remainder. Yes, it is scarcely six months ago that a journalist affirmed that I was not only the most beautiful woman in Paris, as the heroine of a romance which has made a great noise, but the most beautiful woman in the world. . . . It was the duke, yes, my husband, that showed me the article. . . .

I was furious, with good reason, that they dared to speak thus of my person ; I wished to protest, to have them silenced, but he said to me with his gentle smile . . . Ah ! why do I see it still before me . . . he said to me : “My dear wife, it would show bad taste to complain. Your name, your fortune, your beauty, make you a personage, a celebrity. You belong, by right, to the journalists.” Yes, in place of being angry at this praise . . . he who had never sought notoriety for himself, who loved silence, and shade . . . he appeared proud and delighted. He still loved me then . . . and yet, this woman, this Mélinite ! He only wanted her, the marquis insinuated. He wanted her ! What has she then more desirable than I ? Ah ! I should much like to know. And what does it matter to me ! Shall I lower myself by thinking of such a creature ! He deceived me ! He betrayed me ! That is what touches me. It is indifferent to me that it was with this one or that, with one kind or another. How perfectly he deceived me ! I should never have doubted him. . . . It is admirable ! What diplomacy ! What a comedian he would have made ! What correctness in his incorrectness ! Nothing changed in his life. If he did not accompany me to the theatre, into the world, he passed his evenings

near me, at home, in the little blue chamber . . . where I dare not enter more ; for I see him always seated in the same place ; . . . at what time in the day did he deceive me then ? At what hour did he love her ? From four to seven, his club time, or, rather, it would be more correct to call it, the time when married men carry out their amours, deceive their wives and commit adultery, while it enables them to preserve a correct appearance, a last decency.

From four to seven ! Why do they call these women, then, the belles of the night ? It would be more just to call them the belles of the day. It is true that they do not neglect to take advantage of the night ; it is then the turn of the bachelors, or of those married men who no longer dissimulate, but deceive openly. . . . I am not sure that I do not prefer these last. . . . Yes, to return to their honest, legitimate wives, to pass their nights in hypocrisy, their evenings near them, when they have sullied themselves all day in the arms of others, is a fresh infamy, is a fresh injury.

I recollect — it is as fresh in my memory as if it was yesterday — there was no change, not only in his life, in his habits, in the respect and attention he paid me, but in his caresses, until the time that he was taken ill. Was he really ill ? Was it not

rather a feigned illness, in order to make one think that he committed suicide in his delirium? . . . Ah! he deceived me throughout, and the doctor also. . . .

Yes, the same caresses. I even believe that in the last few days he was more than usually amorous. Remorse, without doubt, caused that. . . . Or, perhaps, it was to deceive me still more, to distance my suspicions. . . . A guilty person is always suspicious. . . . And then, . . . the other, this Mélinite, had taken his fancy, had taught him to love her better than myself. . . . Such women should be able to do so, it is their trade. . . . Ah! why do we not struggle against them? Why cannot we inspire the same love that they do? It is, perhaps, our ignorance, or, perhaps, our decency, our virtue that causes us to lose our husbands. They go elsewhere to seek that which we do not give them. Less tenderness, ladies, more passion. Do they possess more passion? What does it matter, as long as they know how to act it . . . and the duke, perhaps allowed himself to be deceived. I have often thought he had not seen much life until our marriage. He was a clever, reserved man. He encountered one bad woman and she conquered him. Wisdom went, and folly came.

Yet! no, it cannot be that! If he had loved her foolishly, with passion, he would have been happy, he would not have killed himself. . . . There is something else. I would I knew what.

I have never heard this Mélinite spoken of. If she was well known, was a leader among such women, I should have heard her name. Men no longer refrain from speaking before us of them, and the mention of an impure name cannot tarnish our purity.

With myself, curious by nature, surnamed by some one the living "note of interrogation," they refrain still less. It is not to be denied that I love to be instructed, provided that I am instructed with tact, and with modesty. They know that I hear that only which I wish to hear, and they can go on until I stop them with a look, which sometimes makes these naturalists wish themselves under the earth.

No. I have searched well. . . . Never this name of Mélinite. . . . Who then, is this girl? What has she so extraordinary, that the duke should prefer her to myself, should have given her a million, and killed himself for her sake?

V.

18th June.

I KNOW her, that is to say, I have received some information about her, for I hope never to know her, even by sight.

It is my little cousin, Arthur de Blazac, who has edified me about her. I say "edified." I should say "scandalized."

What a funny man is this Blazac ! Lean, pitiful and fair, with his little nose, his little mouth, his little hands, his little feet, everything little, one might take him, notwithstanding his thirty years, to be a pupil of the "Sacr  -C  ur," disguised as a boy.

We hoped, at one time in the family, to have made something of him, but he was not long in escaping from us in order to lead a gay life, to use his own expression; in doing which he has not improved ; he is more pitiful than ever. He comes to see me, from time to time, because I am kind to him, and do not read him moral lectures ; because I allow him to speak freely before me, and because he makes his band of gay companions,

both male and female, envious by saying to them : "I have just been to see my cousin, the Duchess de X——." For myself, I receive him when I have nothing better to do, as one looks at a society journal, or one that pretends to be such.

Blazac is, in truth, a living gazette, a little book ; he relates all the tittle-tattle, knows everything that passes in Paris, in his Paris, which is a sufficiently wicked one ; he knows all the celebrities, particularly the women. To-day when he was announced I was on the point of saying I was not at home, for I did not feel in the humor to be amused by him. But the desire to question him, to find out certain things, came upon me all at once, and I said : "Very well ; show him in." I did not lose my time by doing so. Scarcely was he seated in a large arm-chair, where he almost entirely disappeared, than I directed the conversation toward the point that alone interested me.

"Well, cousin," I said to him, "you are still amusing yourself in Paris, notwithstanding the season. Have all your beautiful 'Tendresses,' as you call them, and which, I must admit is a good name, taken their flight since the 'Grand Prix' was run. Tell me, for I am no more in the world."

"Cousin," he replied, trying to smooth an invis-

ible, light mustache, "Paris is wearied with itself since it has lost its idol."

"What idol? The general?"

"No, not the general. It is yourself, Cousin Olga."

"I!" The compliment is so well turned that I did not know it was coming. . . . "Of what Paris do you speak, then? mine or yours? Mine, you never visit; you sulk with it, and it sulks with you. How do you know that it regrets me? Yours, I am not acquainted with . . . happily. It neglects me, disdains me, to occupy itself with Mademoiselles Lucy Seymour, Nelly Beer, Marion de Lorme, Blanche de Closmeuil."

"How do you know these names?" he cried, in astonishment.

To know them it is only necessary to read *Le Gil Blas*, and I often read it, and do not hide the fact from you that I prefer it to the *Gazette de France*. I could mention to you other well-known names: Mathilde de Montalbert, or Louise Babin, Henriette la Russe, Mélinite . . ."

"Oh! as to that, you have never seen her name in *Le Gil Blas*."

"Why not?"

"She is in bad odor with it."

"How is she on bad terms with *Le Gil Blas*? You puzzle me."

"Because she said to Paul and Charles D. that she did not want any puffing, and that she would give them nothing to write about her."

"These women pay those then, that recount their triumphs?"

"Sometimes, but not in money!"

"In what?"

"In love. Those that are kind to them, they are kind to, in their turn. You understand."

"It would be difficult not to understand; you veil it so thinly, cousin. . . . I understand now why the same women are mentioned every morning: they are those that are amiable every night, . . . and Mdlle. Mélinite is not in the number?"

"She does not wish to be written about. She has the idea of making her way alone."

"And has she made this way?"

"I should think so, she has a million."

I started without his perceiving it, for he is as short-sighted as he is little.

Then, making an effort:

"A million truly?" I asked him.

"Most truly, of full value; in bills, deeds, and bonds payable to bearer. I have seen the parcel; it is large."

“She shows it like that?”

“Certainly, to the women to enrage them; to the men to make them give her more. You can imagine one would not dare to send five louis to a female millionaire.”

These words, five louis, appeared to him a little risky, and he stopped himself, as if he thought he had said too much. But I thought that such a small person could not say too much, and without appearing startled, said:

“When she has no longer riches to make a show of, what will she do? She will show then, without doubt, less grandeur.”

“She has been rich almost from the time of her début, thanks to the Baron de Virmeux.”

“The Baron de Virmeux? you were acquainted with him then, Blazac?”

“Not at all; I have always thought that it was a false name. Mélinite has had the same idea. But she has not cared for that, the important part, the million, she has had. Oh! she will not waste her time in a useless search, she is practical. Nothing astonishes her, for I have formed her mind.”

“You have formed it?”

“I mean by that,” he resumed, “that it was I that brought her out.”

“A happy idea, indeed, you had there.”

Full of his subject, he took no notice of the tone of my voice, he only thought of the words.

“*Mon Dieu*,” he said, “the idea was not so bad : disgusted for a long time past with hearing none but fair women spoken of, and of seeing them lauded to the skies, it came into my head, about a year ago, to prove that dark women were quite as good. . . . I ask your pardon for telling you this, cousin, who are so rare a blonde, but your hair is your own, and its color is natural, while that of three-quarters of the fair women is dyed or false. Everybody knows it, and yet they are preferred to brunettes, who are far superior to them. . . . Therefore, I searched for one, and found her. She has had good fortune, and I have proved what I wished to.”

“Where did you find her, in the South ?”

“In Paris, quite simply, at the house of a blonde, whose maid she was.”

“Ah ! your *Mélinite* was formerly a lady’s maid !”

“Yes, cousin. You are not astonished, for many of our ‘swell women’ have commenced like that. . . . I raised the servant to a mistress ; I improved her manners, and bought her some better clothes.”

“Oh ! you clothed her.”

“Afterward. I furnished a small house for her.”

“You do these things well.”

“If I had done them better, if I had ruined myself for her, what should I have proved? That I love dark women. It would only be a personal, isolated case. I wished to prove that she could please others, every one, and I have proved it.”

“Your brunette does not owe her success entirely to the color of her hair, perhaps. She has other qualities; no doubt she is beautiful.”

“Not at all. She is small, thin, with hollow eyes, a turn-up nose—a true soubrette nose—pointed teeth, like a she-wolf, thick and very red lips, a pale complexion. This is an exact photograph of her. You can understand, cousin, that I should not have been foolish enough to find and bring out a beautiful woman, because, as you would have justly observed, it would not have been the color of her hair alone that would have triumphed.”

“Are you sure, Blazac, you are not mocking me? You will never persuade me that any one would give a woman a million simply on account of her black hair. I repeat it, there must be some other reason.”

“Another reason, without a doubt; she is, she is . . . pardon the expression . . . she is like a dog, that is to say, very forward, very passionate.”

“Oh ! do not explain ; the dog is sufficient.”

“And then,” continued he, without attending to me, “she is corrupt.”

“Corrupted by you ?”

“No, she was born so. There are some women who come into the world like that. One can tell them by certain signs, and they should be drowned at twelve years of age.”

“Is it you, who speak thus ?”

“Why not ? One may cultivate vice oneself, and yet deplore the effects upon others. . . . Yes, as long as people refuse to adopt my plan of drowning them, unhappy is mankind ! When one of these creatures has any interest to decoy a man, he is lost. The coldest, the strongest, the most invulnerable will end by inflaming them, and they will be blown up. That is why, cousin, I called her of whom we speak, Mélinite.”

“Oh ! you baptized her also ?”

“Certainly, before bringing her out. I gave her the name of the latest explosive compound, that which is the most powerful of any.”

“Yes, terribly powerful, instantaneous,” I said, sadly.

“That depends,” he replied ; “I have studied the properties of mélinite . . . you know I am very fond of chemistry . . . it is a slow explosive, that

is to say, in certain cases ; it takes effect slowly, like a wedge that is driven with blows from a hammer into a resisting mass. . . . Oh ! I am well versed on this question. I do not baptize a woman, as one baptizes a child, without knowing why it is called Jacques or Jean. I called her *Mélinite* because, like this explosive, she has a harmless appearance, that she appears, and is absolutely inoffensive under ordinary conditions. She can clash violently against another body, she can approach the heat, and she will not explode if she is not prepared to explode. But if she is, if she has been placed in contact with a good fulminating capsule, get out of the way. The explosion is formidable, she kills all that she meets."

"Yes, she kills," I repeated.

Fearing that he would perceive my emotion, I compelled myself to add :

"It appears that she has not killed you."

"Oh ! I," said he, with the air of a conqueror, with a new effort to stroke his absent mustache, "I have known so many explosives. They are most dangerous to the clever and the strong, who count upon their strength and their wisdom, who think that they have nothing to fear from so small an enemy, and allow themselves to approach it. They resemble an iron-clad opposed to a tor-

pedo. For myself, I know that I am feeble, and not wise, and I keep upon my guard. Besides, after launching Mélinite, I took to flight, through fear of an explosion. I will add, cousin, since you do not stop me, that she has no interest in entrapping me, or in destroying me. She knows well that I shall not make her fortune, and she therefore waits a better occasion, for I have said, I believe, that Mélinite explodes at will."

"At the will of others as much as your Mélinite explodes at her will, when she wishes to do evil."

"Not always. She has her sudden fancies, her whims, her moments of amorous folly, that may expose herself, also, to serious dangers. Up to the present time she has escaped them, because she has not found any serious resistance, but has broken down all obstacles. If she encounters an exceptional being, endowed with the elasticity of tempered steel and the hardness of cement, which alone can resist Mélinite, she will inflame herself to no purpose, and will consume herself alone."

"Oh, well! I wish that the miserable being of whom we have spoken too long, may encounter this exceptional being. Good-by, cousin."

VI.

IN the hope of getting in the Bois de Boulogne a little fresh air, after a very warm day, I dined yesterday earlier than usual, and toward eight o'clock I left my hotel with my lady companion.

At the Arc-de-Triomphe I ordered the coachman to drive to the Bois by the Maillot gate. With my black carriage and liveries, my dark bay horses, and gloomy appearance, dressed in an Indian robe of cashmere, trimmed with crape, and a bonnet embroidered in white, covered with a heavy dark veil, I should have felt myself a discordant note in the avenue of the Bois de Boulogne, for it was still light, and very crowded.

Some minutes afterward, as I was passing in front of the Ermononville pavilion, I resolved to stop at the Allée des Acacias, near this quiet restaurant, which was not so public as the Cascade or the Château de Madrid, and have some ices brought to me, which both my companion and myself felt in great need of, for the evening was as hot as the day had been. My footman went to order them, and I was waiting for them, when a well-horsed victoria, of

good appearance, drew up at the end of the alley, as my carriage had done, but facing me.

As soon as it had stopped, the person who occupied it, without stepping out, called in a loud voice to one of the restaurant waiters.

“I am not coming in. Is there any one I know here? Is the Vicomte de Blazac inside?”

Hearing the name of my cousin Blazac mentioned, I could not refrain from glancing at my neighbor.

What a droll little woman, and what a singular toilet! A large stiff collar and an enormous scarf round her neck, her thin body inclosed in a waistcoat and tailor jacket, the one of white silk, the other of black cloth; upon her head a soft felt hat, such as men wear when traveling, half covering her short black hair, slightly curled in a fashion which, I believe, is called the “Coiffure à le Belbeuf.” Truly, thus accoutered, one might have doubted her sex, if it had not been for the light and scanty black silk skirt, evidently designed to show her form, but well modeled and well made.

While I made this rapid inspection, a waiter brought the ices, and to enjoy them I was obliged to raise my black veil, lowered until then.

Scarcely was my face uncovered, than my neigh-

bor made a gesture of surprise, as if she had recognized me. Then, raising herself all at once in her carriage, with her hands pressing upon the cushions, and her head forward, she looked at me intently. I was about to return my ice, lower my veil, and give the order to depart, when suddenly Blazac, who I had not noticed coming, appeared at the door of my laudau.

“What, cousin, is it you? I was told that some one was asking for me, but I declare, I did not hope . . .”

I inclined myself toward him, and, speaking in a low, quick tone :

“It is not I who asks for you. It is this woman facing me, in the victoria. Do not look at her while you are speaking to me.”

The caution came too late. Blazac, his eyeglass in his eye, had already looked, and said :

“Why, it is Mélinite !”

Mélinite ! It was my turn to raise myself instinctively. But, at the same moment, I lay back upon the cushions of the carriage, into which I sank as far as possible, in order to banish this creature — to place a greater distance between her and myself. It was the movement of a person to whom some one has said, all at once : “Take

care, there is a viper !” One raises oneself to look at the beast, then recoils, frightened.

But the first movement that I had made recalled to my mind that of this woman when I had raised my veil. How could she know me ? Does she know the true name of the Baron de Virmeux ? Has she said to herself, seeing me : “It is the wife of the man whom I have murdered.” Then, turning again to speak to Blazac, in a very low, quick tone, I asked him :

“Does she know me ?”

“Very well,” said he. “The other day when leaving your house the idea came into my head of going to see her ; and when she said, ‘What good wind brings you ?’ I replied : ‘I was passing your windows, I have just come from seeing my cousin, the Duchess de X. . . .’ ‘The duchess is your cousin !’ ‘Certainly, and I am proud of it.’ ‘You are right, for she is the ideal of beauty. I have never seen any one more perfectly charming, and of exquisite distinction ; and as for her person’”

Blazac was continuing, believing that these eulogies flattered me, whilst on the contrary they made me indignant.

“Enough,” I said, nervously. “How does she know me ? Where has she seen me ?”

“At several charitable fêtes.”

“I was alone, then, without the duke?”

“Probably. It is not usual for stall-keepers to be assisted by their husbands. They would sell less, and the poor would lose . . . She has seen you, also, several times, since you have been a widow, and she thinks you still more beautiful in your widow’s weeds” . . .

This time I had no occasion to interrupt him. An imperious voice cried :

“Blazac, come here.”

My cousin, who has preserved some remnants of good manners, pretended not to hear, and did not move.

But fearing a new appeal, fearing that she might even come to him in order to look at me more closely, I lowered my veil, wrapped myself in my shawl, and gave the order to my coachman to proceed.

Blazac had the good taste to remain in the same place, with his hat in his hand, and did not rejoin his . . . “Tendresse” until after I had gone.

Now, seated in a corner of my carriage, crossing the Bois in the deepening shadows, in the mist which is covering the lawns and shrubberies, I see again, notwithstanding my efforts, the image of my rival, of her who has made me a widow, and,



P. 16.—WHILST I SLEPT, HE ROSE FROM HIS BED, TOOK FROM HIS DESK A REVOLVER, AND SHOT HIMSELF.

singularly enough, in place of crying: "How has he preferred her to me? What insanity!" in place of criticising her figure, her face, I say: "Her eyes are small, but what a look! The eyes of a bird of prey, who fascinates its victim in order to devour it more easily. . . . If her nose is badly designed, her open nostrils animate her face, give life to her. She smells for . . . the blood of her victim, without doubt . . . like every carnivorous animal. . . . Her very white teeth, though irregular, are pointed. Ah! she should know how to bite! . . . Her body is lean, without doubt; it is the body of a young girl, rather than that of a woman; but some men prefer, they say, an outline to a finished design, a bud to a flower, a young girl to a mature woman. . . . Yes, I can explain now why it is that a man can desire this creature, can prefer her to others, can prefer her to all. I can explain her success, her fortune; why she is irresistible; why she has been given the name of Mélinite. I can explain the treason, the death of my husband." This is what I said to myself last night, crossing the Bois. This morning I can say nothing; I can explain nothing, and may God keep me from all explanation.

VII.

25th June.

SINCE I have been a widow everybody in my house seems to be getting married. It is a sort of epidemic. Do people consider mine an enviable position, and take the only way to become widows themselves? My steward set the example some weeks after the death of his master. I have not replaced him; it is a great saving, considering everything. My lady companion left me yesterday to marry again—to have a second wedding. Poor woman! I shall not replace her before the winter, and not then if I can do without her. But now, my own maid, a woman thirty-five years of age, who, I believed, had vowed eternal celibacy, has left me to marry an hotel-keeper in the neighborhood. This last I must replace; unhappily I am not able to manage for myself. Ah! if I could! To procure a new one I had written to a servants' agency in the street of the "Faubourg Saint Honoré. But they sent me one that did not suit me. As I am going to pass the summer in the country, on my property at

Pas de Calais, I want a maid that knows her business, and of sufficiently good appearance to go out with me, if I wish to take a walk in the country. I hope in this way to find combined, at the same time, for some months, a maid and companion, and in place of being condemned to see two new faces, to see only one, which has its advantages. In order to explain better, this time I went myself to the office in question. I sent the footman in to ask the manager to come out, and, without quitting my carriage, I told her my trouble. As she went away, I perceived Blazac, who had just stopped at the door where I was still stationed. He had his eyeglass upon his nose, and seemed to be looking for the number of the house.

“Blazac !”

He turned round, recognized me, and in the same tone that he said three days before, “Why, it is Mélinite !” he now said, “Why, it is my cousin Olga.”

“Yes, it is I,” said I, smiling, while he approached me. “What a funny place Paris is ! Years pass without meeting a person, and in the same week one meets him everywhere.”

“A happy week, cousin ; I will mark it in my calendar with a cross. But would it be indiscreet

to ask you what you are doing here at eleven o'clock in the forenoon?"

"If it had been an indiscretion I should have hidden, and should not have called to you."

"Evidently; that is why I ventured to ask you."

"Well," I replied, "you find me before this house because it is an agency for servants."

"I was seeking it myself when you perceived me."

"Have you also need of a lady's maid?" asked I, smiling.

"Yes, but not for myself."

"For whom then?"

"For . . . in short, if you must know, for Mélinite."

"Ah!" I said, irritated at hearing this name again. However, fearing he might be astonished with this sudden bad humor against a woman, I only knew by sight, I added:

"She charges you with her commissions, then?"

"Yes, cousin, often; and I do them. What would you have? with certain women it is necessary to . . . blow up, or to render them some little service. I prefer giving the little service. . . . You are not hurt at these artistic expressions?"

"Artistic! You are severe upon art."

"At present it is a pleasure to oblige Mélinite."

She has been charming to me since our dinner in the Ermenonville pavilion."

"Ah! you finished by dining together at nine o'clock in the evening. It was time."

"In our gay life, cousin, there is no dinner hour. Breakfast, dinners and suppers are all the same."

"Excellent for the stomach."

"That is of no consequence with us. . . . During our dinner we were speaking of you the whole time."

"Of me, with such a woman!"

"I could not do otherwise. I tried to turn the conversation, but she always returned to it . . . to her favorite topic: your incomparable beauty."

"I must ask you to be silent," I said, severely.

"*Mon Dieu*, cousin, I do not want to wound you. To be sincerely admired generally gives pleasure. It would with myself. . . . Besides, it was not a question only of your beauty. Mélinite, like the rest of that species, is very curious about all which touches ladies of the true world. Nothing astonishing, for great ladies are curious about them. Also, she had a string of questions, upon your way of living, your habits, our relations. . . . She counseled me to see you frequently, to live in good society. . . . In short, she has become quite

agreeable, so agreeable for three days that I am beginning to feel afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Of her. You understand, an explosion!"

"It will be very tardy!"

"I have told you that mélinite produces a frightful effect when it explodes, but it works slowly also. . . . Those were my own expressions, cousin."

"Yes, I know; do not recommence, I pray you."

"With her, you see, it is necessary to be upon one's guard, above all at the end of June, in the first heat of summer. . . . I recollect, once, about the same time, she disappeared with a man, ah! what a man! the great Bonneuil. . . . You know him?"

"Not at all."

"I thought you did. He was a light tenor; his name was upon all the programmes."

"It escaped my notice. One is not perfect."

"This Bonneuil knew her well; he had surrounded his body with cement and was enabled to resist her without an explosion. Not used to this, she became infatuated, and as Bonneuil was leaving Paris to go out on a foreign tour, she engaged herself in the troupe."

"Is she, then, a comedian?"

"She is a born actress! She plays comedy, the drama, she sings, she dances, and has a talent for making faces! This tour cost her twenty thousand francs."

"How, did she have to pay? I thought, on the contrary, that the artists received a salary."

"So they do, but her manager, the great Shirmann, a wag who understands women, had stipulated for a heavy forfeit if she broke her engagement. She broke it at the end of fifteen days. That imbecile, Bonneuil, had taken off his cement, and been blown up. . . . After the explosion there was no more mélinite."

"And no more of Bonneuil?"

"Yes. They found him, but in a very bad state; he had lost his voice. I fear the same thing, and to avoid it, I think, after this evening, I will take my flight toward the sea."

"An excellent idea. Some sea bathing will do you good. . . . Adieu, cousin, until next November."

"An age! Will you remain all that time in the country, by yourself? You will be very tired of it."

"Because I shall be alone? You are polite. . . . Be so kind as to tell my coachman to return to the hotel."

VIII.

26th June.

I WAS sitting in my favorite chamber, shortly after noon, when the following note was brought me :

“Madame the duchess can have every confidence in the name of Louise Bauquet, who I have the honor to send to her with this. I have gone myself to the ladies she referred me to, and they have all given me the very best report of this person. I shall be happy if she suits madame the duchess, whose very humble servant I have the honor to be.”

Below these words was the name of the manager of the agency to whom I had spoken, and in a corner of the paper the number of the house was printed. I gave the order to introduce Louise Bauquet.

She pleased me at first sight ; neither awkwardness nor too much assurance. A simple but suitable toilet, that of a maid who was destined to go out sometimes in the country with her mistress ; a little straw hat, a princess robe of gray mohair, drawn in at the waist.

“You have served as a lady’s maid before?” I asked her.

“Yes, madame the duchess, in several places.”

“Then you know how to dress hair, and could sew a little, if required, no doubt?”

“Better than that, madame the duchess, for I have always cut out and made my own dresses.”

“I am leaving to-morrow for the country, a solitary part of it, at Pas de Calais, near the sea. Are you not afraid of feeling wearied, and of wishing to return to Paris, which would be very embarrassing for me?”

“Madame the duchess need not fear that, for I am very fond both of the country and the sea.”

“Has what I desire been explained to you—a maid, who, in certain cases, could go out with me, accompanying me?”

“As to that I cannot be certain of suiting madame. I can only ask her to think the best she can of me, and to ask herself if, in the street or in the fields, she would feel ashamed of me.”

This rather pretentious reply did not sound so, because it was spoken in a soft voice, with lowered eyes, and with a half smile. This half smile showed also the half of some teeth I thought I had noticed before. Besides which, in an instant, I said to myself: That face, that physiognomy, is

not unknown to me ; I have seen it somewhere. But the venetian blinds being closed, because of the sun, did not permit me to see very well, more particularly as Louise Bauquet was sitting with her back to the light.

I quitted my place, and approaching the open window I drew back one of the blinds without appearing to take notice. This movement obliged Louise Bauquet to turn round and face the window.

Then I remained speechless. I believed that I saw standing facing me, in the sunlight, the Mélinite I had seen once before, in the twilight. It was the same profound, fascinating look, the same dilated nostrils, the same half-opened, lascivious mouth.

But whilst looking at her, I said to myself : I am the victim of an hallucination. In consequence of occupying myself with this woman, of speaking of her, of thinking of her, I have finished by seeing her everywhere. The other evening in the Bois, in the darkness, with my eyes shut, she appeared to me. She appears now in broad daylight, with my eyes wide open. I am awake, but dreaming.

Certainly, I am dreaming. Mélinite is dark, this girl is fair. . . . Well, but what does that

prove? What does the hair matter, in our days? If one has time, it is easy to dye it. It is not difficult to effect a complete transformation. But this one is taller than the other. . . . Well! it is her Louis XV. heels and her pointed straw hat, whilst the other evening she had on a man's hat, a soft, flat felt.

Am I mistaken? Is this actually Mélinite? What folly! Would she dare to come to my house? Why should she come? While I gaze at her thus, she preserves the same calm and tranquil bearing. But why not? Did not Blazac tell me that she is a natural comedian? The part of a soubrette is familiar to her . . . and besides, I remember she has been a lady's maid before! To-day, she is only resuming her old business.

Ah! this idea is too strong for me, I cannot rid myself of it.

Let me see if the two voices resemble each other.

"What wages do you require?" I asked her, shortly.

"Whatever madame the duchess chooses to give me. I will only remark, that if you do me the honor of taking me out with you sometimes, it will cause me some expense, and . . ."

"I will take care that you shall not lose by that."

No, it is not the same voice. This is softer and more sedate. . . . What does that show? I do not know the other, the true . . . An order given, from a distance, to the porter at the Ermenonville pavilion, and these words, "Blazac, here!"

Is that sufficient to enable me to make a comparison to judge?

Ah! I will finish now by proving to myself that I am dreaming.

"You have spoken of references," I continued. "Are they the papers that you have in your hand?"

"Yes, madame the duchess, these are they."

She handed me several letters. I glanced over them. They were all dated before the time at which Blazac had told me that he "brought out" Mélinite. "These letters are dated a long time ago," I observed. "The latest is more than a year old. What places have you been in since then?"

"One only. I was, and I may say I am still, for I have not left it, at Madame de la Bère, in Francois Premier street."

"A married woman?"

"Yes, madame ; married and with children. Oh! a highly respectable lady."

"And how long have you been there?" I asked her.

"Fifteen months."

"I will see this lady myself about you."

"Very well ; she knows that I am compelled to leave her to earn a little more. . . . I have to assist in supporting my family."

"When shall I find her at home?"

"All day. Madame seldom goes out."

"Then I will go and see her to-morrow morning, and if I am satisfied with what she tells me, I will engage you."

"I thank you very much, madame the duchess, for I have now great hopes of entering your service. . . . It is impossible for Madame de la Bère to tell you anything that is not good about me."

She bowed in a very proper manner, and retired.

Have I not sufficient to convince me now? Is it admissible to suppose that Mélinite can be at once a lady's maid and a leader of the demi-monde, as Blazac said ; that she lives at the house of Madame de la Bère, and at the same time in her own ; that she dines at the Ermenonville pavilion, and yet serves her mistress ; that she wants a maid, and yet is seeking to become one. Shall I

go and personally convince myself by seeing this Madame de la Bère? I feel certain it is a useless thing to do. Louise Bauquet appeared so certain about her. Would she have given the name and address of her old mistress—have sent me to her for a reference, if she had anything to fear? Decidedly, I shall not trouble myself, and I will write to-morrow morning to the agency, and say that the young woman suits me, and I will engage her.

IX.

27th June, 11 a. m.

LAST evening, and during the night, I saw Mélinite again, in the guise of Louise Bauquet. She appeared to me with the same face, in her maid's costume, dark, small and thin. The hallucination has returned, or, rather, my doubts have come back.

Yes, my doubts! What confidence, I said to myself, can I have in these agencies? Have they not, before now, even recommended thieves that they thought were honest people? And my imagination, over-excited for some days, fabricated a little romance:

Blazac told his Mélinite that he had just met me at the door of the agency, and that I also sought a maid. Then this girl, curious to know more of me, to penetrate into the life of an honest woman and a great lady; this creature, acquainted with every weakness, with every folly, took it into her head to retake, for a time, her old trade, to return to her first condition, and to enter my service.

She loses no time ! She disguises herself, transforms her self, and goes to the agency.

There she shows her references, the old, the true ones ; asks for a place in a good house, promises them her first month's wages, and, in addition, gives them some louis on account. The directrice, disposed to favor her, and desirous of suiting me as quickly as possible, said to herself : "It is a matter for the duchess to decide." . . . And sends me her protégée.

This is my little romance. But about Madame de la Bère, to whose house I am going for information. Ah ! well ! Louise Bauquet thinks I shall not go because she asked me to go. This is what passes through my mind. Yet, last night, I decided not to trouble myself. In all probability, there is no such person as Madame de la Bère.

But if there is ? If Louise Bauquet has truly been her faithful servant for fifteen months, and is still living with her ? In that case, she is not Mélinite. My principal personage, my heroine disappears, is effaced, and my romance with her. I must ascertain, then, the existence or the non-existence of Madame de la Bère.

To what purpose ? Why give myself so much trouble ? Why should I engage Louise Bauquet if

I have doubts about her? Are there not other girls to be obtained in Paris?

Without doubt; and yet I should wish to act frankly. I should wish . . . Dear me, what is this everlasting curiosity that possesses me?

X.

27th June, 9 o'clock p. m.

THIS morning I sent a message for Blazac to come and see me. I wished to ask him : first, if he had spoken about me to Mélinite, and if she was aware that I wanted a maid ; second, if he thought she had enough audacity to disguise herself and come to my house ; thirdly, what was her name before he had baptized her ? If she was called Louise Bauquet ?

Blazac would have answered these questions. He has his faults, and even vices, but he has still preserved his respect for his family, and he would not allow himself to become an accomplice of this girl in such a matter.

Unfortunately he was not to be found. He had gone away the night before, without saying where he was going. I was not astonished at his departure. A last interview with "the Explosive" had, without doubt, increased his fears, and, faithful to his system, always prudent, he had taken flight.

I could find out nothing from him, then. But there still remained the mistress of Louise Bauquet,

Madame de la Bère, at whose house she pretended to have been a servant for fifteen months, and suddenly I decided to end it, to . . . ah ! I do not know why . . . go and inquire from her.

Having arrived at her house in the Rue François I sent my footman to ask if Madame de la Bère lived there.

In my own mind I still thought that the door-keeper would reply that no one of that name lived there. I was mistaken. This is her house and nothing prevents me from seeing her.

I entered the house, and as I passed the footman I said :

“Have you asked what floor she lives on ?”

“Yes, madame ; the second.”

“Follow me, and wait in the hall.”

It was a house of good appearance, with a nice staircase. At the second floor I stopped and rang the bell, and Louise Bauquet opened the door. Without speaking she walked in front of me, to show me the way. I took advantage of the opportunity to examine her from behind. Her shoulders are rounded, her waist is well-proportioned, her hips are well developed. The woman that I had seen the other night in the Bois, was not half so plump. I believe in padding to a certain extent, but one can nearly always discern it if it is

overdone. Her heels are not too high, and she walks with grace. She is bareheaded this time, and I can also state, without fear of being mistaken, that her auburn hair is her own, and, like my own, of a natural color. She opens a door, introduces me into a room, and, wheeling forward an arm-chair, asks me if I will wait a few moments. Left alone, I look around me in the hope that I may see something that will enlighten me as to the social position of Madame de la Bère. But there is nothing peculiar about the room. I have seen the same thing in my walks through the shops of the "Bon Marché" and the Louvre, furnished in the eastern style, with very low chairs, heavily cushioned, couches covered with dark-colored velvet, and the usual tapestry hangings. Since so many new shops sell furniture, one does not know what to buy: *honest* women and *dishonest* women buy from the same places, and buy the same furniture. The things on the mantelpiece might tell me something. No. A simple vase filled with flowers. On the walls are a few pictures, in gilded frames, by good artists. Poor painters. This is what their works come to. And is there nothing here to tell me anything? Ah, upon a little chair, a large doll, and quite new. I am tempted to believe it has just been

placed there to show there are children in the house.

Motherly coquetry, no doubt.

I hear a door shutting, and the sound of footsteps. It is she, evidently.

A pretty woman, fair, with a clear white skin and soft blue eyes. These appear tired, and slightly inflamed, as if she had been crying, and have blue circles under them. A pretty nose, a little mouth, with ruby lips; her complexion slightly reddened, as if she had been taking a long walk in the sun, or been having a very animated discussion. I can learn nothing from her personal appearance unless it be that her very full bust appears to want firmness, and that her whole body has the same tendency. In short, I must admit it: a good-looking person of the conventional type, without originality, of no particular style. All this does not tell me who she is. There are fair and good-looking people in all classes of society. Let us pass to her toilet: a woolen robe, drawn at the waist, old rose color, dotted with flowers, and covered with ribbon and lace. Her hair plaited, and wavy over her forehead. Her feet, which seemed very small, in simple shoes of black kid. It is just the house-toilet of a woman who knows how to dress for all occasions. A tradesman's wife

would have put on her best things to do me honor ; a courtesan, or a woman of that kind, would have said to herself : "I do not wish to be annoyed with her questions, what do I care, though she is a duchess. I do not know her, and I am not going to incommode myself for her." And would have simply wrapped herself in a dressing gown, and rolled up her hair. Madame de la Bère knows what is correct, and I begin to class her.

She advances toward me slowly, with a slightly measured step, like an eastern lady of the harem. She wishes, without doubt, to give herself time to look at me, to judge me, and I believe her judgment is favorable to me, for her eyebrows lose their frown, and she smiles. I am accustomed to these things. At the moment she nears me she manages to place her back to the light, and to leave me facing it, a thing that I have remarked before ; the mistress of a house knows her ground. She profits by this to show herself to advantage, and to depreciate the beauty of others.

Seated thus, she said to me, without embarrassment :

"Then, madam, you are going to rob me of my maid ?"

She smiled as she spoke, and thus corrected this slightly aggressive speech.

I replied, smiling myself :

“Not unless you are willing to permit it, madame.”

“Alas ! I cannot help it,” she replied, with a sigh, and lowering her voice, and inclining herself to me, as if she wished to confide a secret to me, she added :

“My husband is in some speculations, and they are not looking well at this time ; I have two children to provide for, and I can only give a maid low wages. Louise Bauquet desires to better her position, not for herself, but for her family, who she partly supports, and as I am interested in her, I allow her to leave. In fact, I was the first to counsel her to seek a better position.”

This very precipitate and well-turned avowal looked rather as if it had been prepared for the occasion ; but it was said in a natural and graceful manner. Decidedly I was in the presence, not only of a woman of my world, but of a woman of good breeding, and I felt myself put out when she avowed with so much frankness her lack of fortune. I suffered to think that . . . merely because I was richer than she was, I was about to take a servant from her to whom she seemed attached, and I could not help saying :

“I am truly sorry . . . ”

"She stopped me :

"Sorry, why ? If Louise does not enter your service she will, not the less, seek another place, and will not be long in leaving me. Therefore, do not think of that, if she suits you."

The more to ease her, I replied :

"I trust to you alone, madame, to tell me if you think she will suit me. You ought to know her well, if she has been, as she affirms, in your service for more than a year."

"Yes, about fifteen months."

"And you have never had to complain of her ?"

"I have only had to praise her."

"She is intelligent, is she not ?"

"Oh, yes ; very."

"Industrious ?"

"Very industrious and fond of work. Nothing stops her ; she does not know what fatigue is. Day and night, when I have wanted her, I have found her always good-tempered, always ready."

"Have you found her honest ?"

"As to her honesty, I can only say I have never missed anything since she has been with me. It is true, I have always given her anything she wanted. But I think that when a mistress is satisfied with her maid, the least she can do is to pro-

cure for the girl, in her turn, some little enjoyments."

"Very true; and I always act in that way, madame."

"I do not doubt it, and she hopes it also."

"Has she told you my intentions as regards herself while I am in the country? She will go out sometimes with me. She will even act as my companion, for I shall be alone there this year. Do you think, madame, that she will give me satisfaction?"

"She is capable of anything," she said, in a lively tone. "For that matter, she has been employed by me in a double capacity. She is a well-brought-up girl, that wants very little instruction, and with whom, I do not hide it, I often willingly entertain myself. I shall not replace her easily," she added, with a sad smile, a smile of regret at the thought that after what she had told me, she would certainly lose her maid.

"And why should I hesitate? Have I not received certain proofs that there is no connection between Louise Bauquet and Mélinite. How can I expect to get from anyone better references than she has given me. What reasons could Madame de la Bère have to deceive me? Her desire to keep her maid is evident. If she had known her

to have faults would she not have told them to me to frighten me, and make me renounce my project.

"There is nothing more, then, for me to do," I said, on leaving her, "than to apologize to you for the trouble I have given you, and to thank you for your kindness in answering my questions."

"Then you have decided to take her?" she asked.

"Yes; for what you have told me about her has assured me that she will suit me."

"I am certain of it; you will never let her leave you when you know her as well as I do. I also think," she added, with a tinge of bitterness, "that she would not part from you as easily as she leaves me."

"Why, yours is an excellent place."

"Her next one will be still better. She will enjoy many things that I cannot give her. . . . Then, there is novelty. All girls like a change. A new mistress attracts them more than an old one."

She decidedly regretted her departure very much—a little too much. It was giving an exaggerated importance to a maid. She had been to her, certainly, a sort of companion, from her own statement.

But, to conclude, I asked her:

"When will it suit you, madame, for Louise

Bauquet to leave your service for mine ? Will you fix the time yourself ? ”

“ Take care. I may abuse your kindness. ”

“ Abuse it ? ”

“ As I told you, I shall replace her with difficulty, and I should like to take advantage of her last few days with me to get her to do a few little things for me that another could not do as well. If I say in a week’s time, would you think it too much ? ”

“ No ; but as I leave to-morrow, she must join me in the country. I will leave her my address. ”

“ Thank you very much. Shall I call her in ? ”

“ Do not give yourself that trouble. I will speak to her in the hall. ”

“ Then I will ring for her to see you to the door, and will leave you together. ”

I bowed and left the room.

As soon as Louise Bauquet presented herself, she appeared anxious to know the result of my conversation with her mistress.

“ I have resolved, mademoiselle, ” I said, “ to engage you. ” At the same time I slipped five louis into her hand.

“ Thank you, madame the duchess, ” she said, in a tone in which I noticed some slight emotion. “ When shall I place myself at your orders ? ”

“In a week from this time. Madame de la Bère wishes to keep you a few days longer.”

She did not seem to like this; perhaps she feared I might change my mind during this time. Perhaps, also, knowing Madame de la Bère better than I did, she thought she might give her too much work to do this last week. Whilst thinking thus, I wrote some lines in my pocket-book, and, tearing out the leaf, I gave it to her, saying: “You have only to follow out these instructions.”

This great business is finished, then. It is the first time I have given myself so much trouble for a maid.

XI.

2nd July.

I ARRIVED at my estate of the "Ruins," at Pas-de-Calais, three days ago. The name of this estate, which has belonged to my family for centuries, pleased the duke very much when he heard it the first time.

"An old castle, is it not?" said he.

"Not at all," I replied. "On the contrary, quite a modern building, a large villa, rather than a castle, built by my father upon the plain extending from Portel, a fishing village near Boulogne-sur-Mer."

As he appeared surprised that a modern villa should be called the "Ruins," I explained the matter to him.

In the park, and now close to the edge of the cliff, in consequence of the encroachments of the sea, there still stands the ruins of an old castle with its stone turrets, its moat and its drawbridge, and projecting upon its walls, respected still by the ivy which surrounds it, is the coat of arms of

the Counts of Boulogne, for I am a descendent, nearly directly, from those powerful lords.

Many centuries ago Matthieu d'Alsace, one of the aforesaid counts, had seized, apparently by force, though it is said with her connivance, the beautiful Marie, Abbess of Ramsay, and had brought her to the castle and married her. Am I sure, with her consent? No, the history is too old. But the beautiful abbess is one of my ancestors, and I prefer to believe, for the sake of the family, that she was not the victim of an abduction, but, rather, that she followed the dictates of her heart. Nothing is more probable at a time when the heart spoke much and strongly, for a woman's life was necessarily quiet and without pleasures. In this age it is different; women's heads have so many distractions that their hearts remain inactive, and are no longer captured by the prowess of a brave cavalier, as in the good old days.

The Abbess of Ramsay, from her turrets, had a scene under her eyes that was sufficient to please and charm her. For myself, since I have been at the "Ruins," I have fallen in love with this country. It is true that, at the present time, the views are much more varied than they were in 1160, the year of the loves of the count and abbess. From the heights, and descending into

the valley, the country extends, with its green meadows dotted with flowers. On the side of the hill is the little chapel of "Ave Maria," consecrated to the patron saint of the country, "Etoile de la Mer. Further on, at the bottom, is the valley of the "Loire," and its river, silvered by the sun.

Taking a half turn to the left, on my balcony, I see the village of Portel, with its fisheries, busy, laborious and picturesque, with its fishermen and fisherwomen, descended, as the legend goes, from some Spaniards who were cast upon the shore from a shipwreck—a shipwreck, the recollection of which should make them rejoice. No doubt, from their shipwrecked ancestors, they derive their sparkling black eyes, their nut-brown hair, their little hands and beautiful teeth.

Yes, I have a great liking for this part of the country—my country, I might say, for my ancestors have lived here, have fought here, have loved here, since the days of Matthieu d'Alsace and his beautiful abbess.

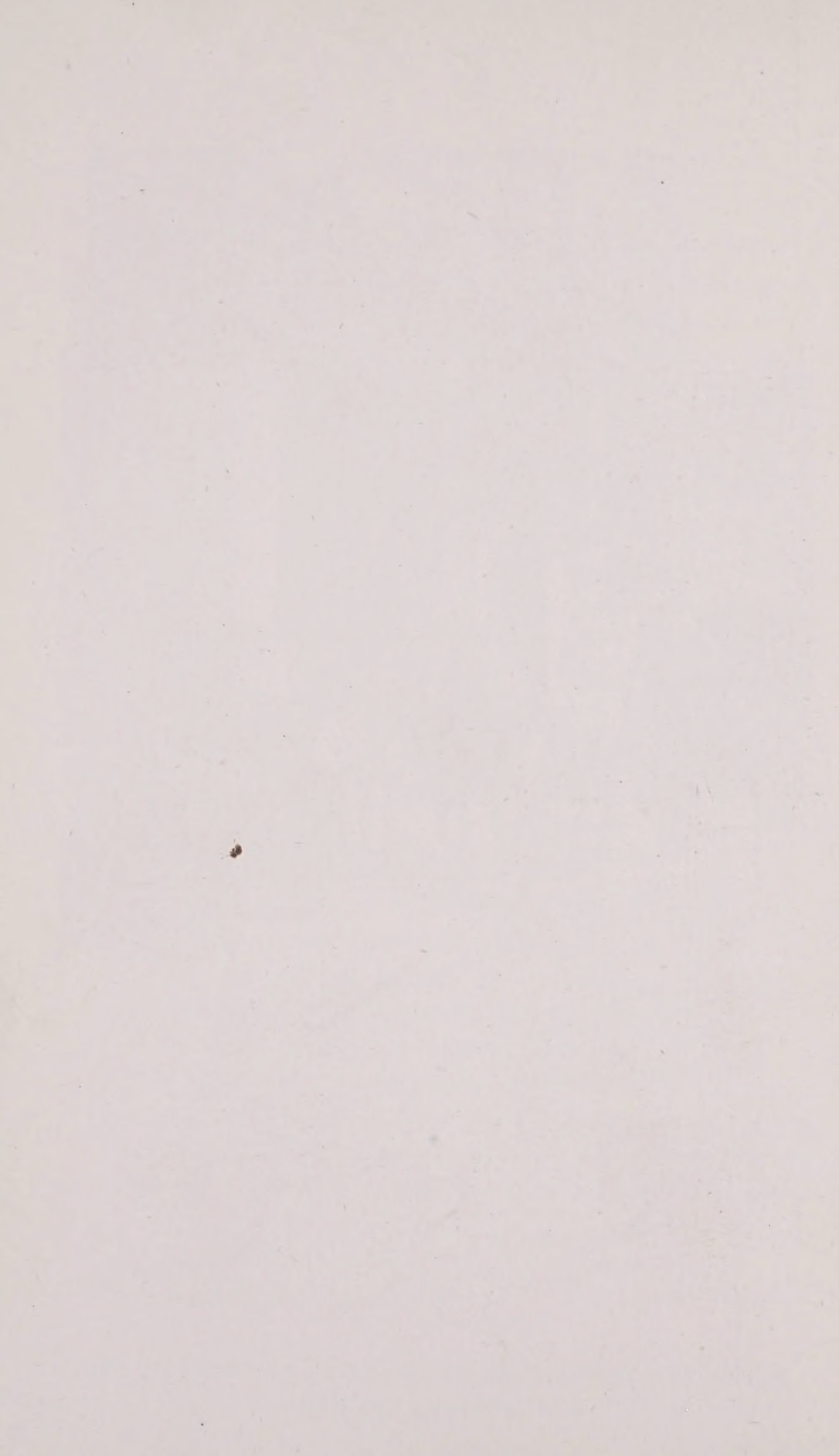
I often take a walk into the lofty and old town of Boulogne, so distinct from the new, and surrounded by massive walls that separate it from its neighbor. These old walls seem to say to the passer by: "Do not confound me with the other.

The town which surrounds me, which wishes to embrace me, and which I keep at a distance, is of no merit, is not worthy of your consideration. It is worthless, it is too new. I alone am worthy of your respect. Only think of it ! I date from the Romans, from Julius Cæsar. I was then called *Bolonia*, from which has come the name *Boulogne*. I have seen *Attila*, the King of the Huns ; the great *Charlemagne*, *Philip Augustus*, who rebuilt my fortifications, and *Edward the Third*, King of England. He espoused, in my cathedral, *Isabelle*, the daughter of *Philippe le Bel* of France. And how many times have I been besieged ! I resisted for a month thirty thousand Englishmen and a hundred pieces of artillery. What can the new town show like this ?”

Without listening any longer to the recollections of these old walls, I will refresh myself. I mount an old worm-eaten ladder, and find myself upon the ramparts covered with trees and flowers, a veritable garden in the air. What a beautiful promenade is this circular walk, what varied views ! What hills, valleys, water-courses, woods ! And without wishing to displease the proud old town, I see modern *Boulogne* with its new houses, its splendid buildings, its port, its baths, its railroads, its life and its casino. And I have been in it with



P. 46.—THE DUCHESS MEETS MÉLINITE IN FRONT OF THE
ERMONDVILLE PAVILION.



my husband—a very beautiful casino, large and elegant, in a good position upon the shore at the entrance to the port, with a large flower-garden, a splendid concert-hall; for the duke, who loved Boulogne as I love it, and wished to make it attractive to visitors, protected its casino, and did not disdain to show himself there with me.

What a peculiar thing is the love of play. The richest people are attracted by it. They will spend or give away large sums with the most complete indifference, yet, at a gaming-table, they are sensible to the most trifling gain, the smallest loss. If I had been a man, I believe I should have played to enjoy the excitement of the game. Though a woman, on one occasion, when my husband was with me, I tried a game of baccarat. Yes, I dared one evening, after the theatre, to join the players in the Casino at Boulogne. Gontran did not wish it.

“It is not your place,” he said to me.

However, seeing I was very desirous, he permitted me. On entering the saloon, and looking round, the duke exclaimed :

“Mercy, . . . what a number of English. . . . I see them on all sides. In the days of Napoleon the First they threatened us with an invasion they never effected; now, they do not threaten, but

they land here every day at all hours. Boulogne has become an English colony."

"So much the better," I said, "they bring money here."

"Truly, they carry with them pocket-books full of bank notes, but are they going to risk it at baccarat? No, they come simply to dazzle the gamesters. The English always win, because they are more prudent in their play, more masters of themselves than the French. You can judge for yourself. An Englishman is taking the bank. He is going to deal. Observe him."

"I wish," said I, timidly, "to play against him, to understand it better. Will you allow me to do so?"

"Oh! certainly; I knew what you wished, from the moment you entered."

"What must I do?"

"Place your money upon the table, there . . ."

"Stop; he has taken it away."

"Yes, you have lost."

"I will try again, and double the amount."

I did so, and lost again.

"I will double again."

"That is throwing good money after bad, which is a grave imprudence."

“Why,” I said, “this Englishman cannot always win, every time.”

“No, and he knows it well. Observe, he is giving up the bank.”

“What !” cried I, “after providing himself with my money.”

“It is not necessary for him to continue. That is his strength, the strength of the English. They regard us with coolness, profit by our faults, and enrich themselves at our expense.”

“If I take the bank, perhaps I can do the same as he has done.”

“You take the bank ! It only wanted that. However, ladies can not take it.”

“Why ?”

“Because the Minister of the Interior and the police do not allow it.”

“For what reason ?”

“It is supposed that women are not skillful enough.”

“Is there any advantage in taking it ?”

“A very great advantage ; there is not the same chance of being robbed.”

“Then men, playing cards, have a chance of robbing women, and the women are not able to do the same to them.”

“Exactly so.”

“Your Minister of the Interior is a moral man.”

“Ah ! permit me,” said the duke, smiling. “It is not my minister. My party does not name the ministers, it submits to them.”

“Let us go,” said I, taking his arm. “I have seen enough.”

“And lost enough ?”

“Too much, to an Englishman ; it is humiliating.”

“No ; it is natural.”

This is a true account of my visit to the gambling circle at Boulogne. Why do I recall it to-day ? Ah ! the reason is that in this country everything recalls my husband to me. Perhaps that is the cause of my coming down here. What happy days we passed together on our balcony in the park, or driving through the town or country. If I write or describe these things it is because I have seen it all with him ; we have admired it all with the same eyes, the same mind, the same soul. . . . How well he could talk ; he could instruct me ; and I was never tired of listening to him. They called him cold. He ! whom I have seen so enthusiastic over a beautiful thing, a great idea, or a good action. Yes, but he also had a passion for a wicked, contemptible creature. How could he do it ? Ah ! if she was in my power. . . . If it was

possible for me to do the evil to her that she has done to him, to kill her, as she has killed ; . . . but before giving myself this pleasure, this great joy, I must question her ; I must know more.

XII.

4th July.

LOUISE BAUQUET arrived yesterday, on the day and at the hour appointed. Her eyes are looking worn and her figure thin.

The journey from Paris to Boulogne could not have fatigued her much, so I suppose Madame de la Bère must have overworked her the last few days. But with myself, who do not want her to do much work, and with the sea air to assist her, she will soon pick up flesh again. A very slight thing affects a delicate figure like hers. That kind of irregular beauty alters more easily than regular features, in which the outlines preserve their regularity and their purity in spite of a little fatigue. For I am too just not to recognize that this girl, without being exactly beautiful, has a very pleasing appearance. In the last century, men would have said, looking at her: "She has a wicked eye, that of an assassin." Now they would apply to her a phrase which is abused, but which is sufficiently expressive of their thoughts: "She is not beautiful, but she is worse than beautiful."

Beautiful or ugly, it matters little, if she does what I require from her, and I believe that she will do that. Madame de la Bère could not have wished to deceive me when giving her to me as a model maid, capable of being a companion if I wished it. To let my servants know that she is destined for that second occupation, which places her above the rest of them, I have given her a room adjoining my own, and I have decided that she shall breakfast and dine alone, at the same time as myself. I attain my aim in this way : I keep her from the eyes of the others, and I feel less alone, in the night, in this great house, which seems very empty now its master is no more, and since I have reduced the number of my servants. At any rate, if the fancy seizes me, I can, without rising from the table, call my companion to go out with me. Her duties will not be neglected in consequence ; they will be done, when she is called away, by a young country girl placed under her orders.

All this being arranged yesterday, after dinner. I spent the evening in uneasy thought upon my balcony, and went to bed when I felt sleepy, without calling anyone. This morning, then, was the first chance I had of appreciating the services of Louise Bauquet as a maid. Being desirous, no

doubt, of showing her zeal from the start, and of giving me as soon as possible a proof of her knowledge, she watched for me to awake. Scarcely were my eyes open when she glided into my room, softly, upon the tips of her toes, and going to the windows, drew back the curtains, carefully, as if she feared the light might dazzle me.

“Is it fine?” I asked her, to let her know I was awake.

“A superb day, madame the duchess.”

“What time is it?”

“Nine o’clock.”

“Oh! it is late! I am generally much earlier. I shall get up.”

Without any noise she approached the bed, and found in a moment what I wished for, as if she had arranged it all herself the previous evening, and, kneeling down, placed herself in front of me to draw on my stockings. As a rule, I do that myself. No doubt, however, she was in the habit of dressing her former mistresses from head to foot, and as I did not want to sink in her estimation, I let her do it, though I might have told her that duchesses are often less well served than citizens’ wives.

Before judging her capabilities as a maid, I waited to see how she would do my hair, which is

a more difficult exercise. After having taken my breakfast, which she brought me herself on the usual little table, for she seemed to know by instinct all my fancies, I passed into my dressing-room, and told her to dress my hair.

"In what style, madame," she asked.

"In the same style as yesterday. While I am in mourning I do not intend to wear it otherwise."

"Would madame," she said softly, "allow me to try a different style, which is quite as simple."

"Ah, you think," I said, gayly, "that I wish to know something of your ability?"

"That would be very natural."

"True; and as it is only right to give you an opportunity to show it, do it as you please. If you do not make it simple enough, you must do it again. I only wish you to try this time upon my head a simple style suitable for the country."

I smiled, and she smiled also, but in a discreet, respectful manner.

Then she commenced, and I must admit I have never felt upon my head a more skillful hand. If, while she was combing my loosened hair, which was hanging in thick waves over my shoulders, she encountered a little entangled, rebellious lock, instead of pulling at it, or trying to break through the obstacle, she loosened it gently with her light

fingers, that I scarcely felt, and triumphed with skill over every difficulty. In completing this first work I might, perhaps, have thought she was rather slow, and had a somewhat lingering hand. But I did not dream of complaining, for I gradually grew sleepy under the caress of the comb. This sleepiness, this languid feeling, made me feel comfortable, and I fell into a little, soft, voluptuous doze.

My eyes, however, were not quite shut. Through the nearly closed but yet open lids I saw, in the mirror placed before me, Louise Bauquet raising and lowering her arms, passing from right to left, stepping backward to note the effect, to judge her work, which was approaching completion. She appeared to be very satisfied with it; one moment leaning toward me she seemed to admire it as if in ecstasy. For my part, half asleep, I followed her with a pleased feeling, and could not help admiring the grace of her movements, of her poses, of her features, so varied in expression; with her changing eyes, her nostrils dilating, and the few little expressions which, while she worked, fell from her red lips. She was no more the reserved, correct, lady's maid that I had seen at my house and at that of Madame de la Bère. It was an artist, who had taken up hairdressing, elevated it

to an art, and was applying herself to it as a painter to his picture, a sculptor to his statue.

A celebrated costumier, whose advice I once asked as to the form of a corsage, replied to me : "I beseech you, madame the duchess, to allow me time to become inspired, to isolate my thoughts." And in order to seek inspiration, and to isolate them, he raised his eyes to heaven, as Raphael or Murillo must have done when they created their Madonnas.

All at once, in my half sleep, I thought I felt a hot breath in my hair, and, at the same time, the light contact of something warm and slightly humid.

"What is that?" I cried, drawing away my head.

"It is nothing," lightly replied Louise Bauquet. "One of madame's hairs was troublesome, and not having the scissors in my hand, I bit it off with my teeth."

At the same time she raised herself and showed me, between her pointed teeth, with her lips half opened, the end of a fair hair.

Half smiling and half serious, I said to her :

"The next time use the scissors. You will wear out your teeth too soon doing that."

"Oh, no !" she replied. "Madame's hair is so

fine. I have never seen anything so beautiful, of such a lovely color."

"Let me see what you have done," said I, quickly, to put a stop to her admiration. And, raising myself in front of the glass, I looked at my new coiffure.

She had arranged it in a shape which is called, I believe, the "*casque à la Minerve*," and it suited me admirably. For a long time I had never seen anything so well done ; it was perfect ; and I had never seen myself looking so charming. In my little feminine contentment and self-love I could not help saying :

"It is very good, indeed ; you are very skillful."

"Then, if madame the duchess is satisfied," she replied, "may I dare to ask her a favor ?"

"What is it ?"

"That you will wear this coiffure all day.

"Oh ! you wish to have time to admire your work."

"I should wish to have time to admire madame the duchess, who is very beautiful thus."

"Is it so !" said I, a little ingenuously, a little foolishly, for I was still looking at it, and was obliged to admit that she was correct. But in order to punish myself for my vanity, to punish her also, perhaps, for her exaggerated enthusiasm, I

added, seating myself : "No ; I shall not wear it. Take it down."

She obeyed without a murmur, destroying in a minute her beautiful work, and in a short time she raised another much more simple and suitable. "This is very good, also," I said, to console her. In truth, it was not as much to my taste ; the "casque de Minerve" suited me better.

After going out into the park, into the meadows, and making a bouquet of wild poppies, daisies and corn-flowers, I returned to the house, and commenced writing up my diary.

On reading what I had written, I asked myself why I had said so much about Louise Bauquet. That I should interest myself about her as a maid, as a hair-dresser, is natural. But it is not natural for me to think too much of a person destined to be my servant. That I should remark her ability, her skill and her tact, is quite right. These are her business qualities, which I can commend with pleasure, for they make my life easier. But why should I trouble myself about her figure, or her face ? Why should I write, at the beginning of this chapter, that she appeared fatigued when she arrived ? I ask myself, because I have always liked to analyze my sentiments, the thoughts which I

obey, even when they are of a trivial nature, of little things, of insignificant people.

After thinking, I believe I have found out the reason. In the first place, I am here alone, far from all novelties, deprived of all amusements; the arrival of this peculiar girl, who appears above her station, has been quite a little event for me. In Paris, in my former eventful life, it would have passed almost unnoticed. Here, it occupies my mind more than it deserves.

The attention which I have given to this subject has also, perhaps, a more serious cause. In consequence of a kind of hallucination, of the condition of my nerves, perhaps, I was lately much struck with her resemblance to someone else, and even against my will. I am still, at times, under this old impression. My first thoughts have not been entirely effaced. In Louise Bauquet I nearly always see Mélinite. No doubt this feeling will pass away, like everything else. I am not uneasy about it. However, I shall not be astonished if I find the name of my new maid often written in this journal, during the course of this summer, while I am living this idle country life.

XIII.

4th July.

In order to complete my opinion of Louise Bauquet, I told her this morning, after breakfast, to hold herself in readiness to go out with me about three o'clock. In this way I raised her in one day from a lady's maid to a lady's companion. Is this too sudden ; will it make her vain ? Her toilet, which I glanced at when she came to me at the time appointed, showed me she had good taste in dress also. A marine blue cambric robe, with a white lozenge, a plaited corsage and belt ; upon her head a little hat of white straw, with a blue ribbon the same shade as her dress ; three buttoned gray suede gloves ; in her hand a black silk parasol, and over her arm she carried a jacket, as a precaution, to put on if the afternoon grew colder. It all appeared simple and lady-like, without being too elegant ; a toilet that a poor girl of respectable parentage might make herself, or buy ready-made in any large draper's shop. Her boots, however, that I noticed as she stepped into the victoria, could not have been bought at one of

those shops ; their English shape was too good, their unpolished, fine and supple kid fitted too closely to the small, long foot, not to have cost a good sum. They must have been worth three louis, at least, and for a maid to pay that ! . . . I am not just ; she is, at this moment, my companion, and she wishes to do me honor. Besides, all women have a little vanity, whatever their position. This girl knows that she has a pretty foot, and has, as is very natural, made some sacrifice, probably deprived herself of something else, to buy them.

I signed to her to seat herself by my side. She obeyed without embarrassment ; holding herself together ; effacing herself in her own corner ; keeping herself at a distance. I could not place her elsewhere, for my victoria has no bracket seat.

I had not been outside my own gates since my arrival at the "Ruins," and I had decided that my first visit should be to old Boulogne, which I like the best, because my husband used to like it. Arrived at our destination, we alighted and entered the Cathedral of Notre Dame. Then, having said my prayers, I made the tour of the famous church to see again its beauties, and, perhaps, also, to show them ; I became, in this way, the *cicerone* of my maid. When one admires, one wishes to

communicate that admiration to others. One day, upon a mountain in the Pyrenees, while watching the setting sun, I said to a shepherd, who was near me: "How beautiful this is?" He could not understand me, but it did me good to speak, to tell my enthusiasm to some one. One might wish that the some one was presentable, but when one has no choice it cannot be helped. Thus I tried to make Louise Bauquet admire the altar of Notre Dame as I admired it myself, with its marvels of old mosaic work, its rare stones, topazes, malachites and lapis lazuli. After the altar, I showed her the Virgin's chapel, with its floor of white Carrara marble, the dome with its arches, the cupola, looking so picturesque in its old grayness. Remounting the carriage, I yielded again to my desire to show a little learning, and recounted the legend of Notre Dame. How, in the seventh century, in the reign of King Dagobert, the Virgin Mary appeared to the inhabitants of the town of Boulogne in a boat which neared the shore without sails or oars, in which there was no living soul but a young virgin of an amiable appearance, clothed in modest attire, gracious in her mien, and of a greater beauty than any earthly woman. The people who saw her, at first were stupefied, but she said to them: "A divine light shall de-

scend upon you and upon your town. Forthwith, then, build and dedicate to my name a church on the spot which I have chosen, and which I will point out to you."

Louise Bauquet listened to me attentively, her eyes fixed upon me, as a pupil looks at her teacher ; then she said to me :

" Might I venture to ask madame the duchess if she believes this legend ? "

Slightly embarrassed, for I had not given the question much thought, and yet not wishing to seem to doubt, I thought I would embarrass her, in her turn, and said :

" Have you no religion, mademoiselle ? "

She did not appear troubled at the question, and, without compromising herself, without giving me a more decided answer than I had given her, she said to me, in a gentle voice, with her head lowered, very respectfully :

" It is possible, I believe, without offense to religion, not to believe certain things. There is a difference between religion and superstition. "

I was astonished, not at the idea she had expressed, but at her well-turned phrase, her way of saying it. Decidedly, this girl has a natural talent, or she has lived in much intimacy with her mistresses. Whilst returning, under the influence

of the rising tide, the wind freshened, and Louise Bauquet, careful of her little person, put on the jacket that she carried. This garment drew my attention by its elegant cut — too elegant. It was a kind of tailor-made jacket, that appeared to have come from one of the first houses in Paris.

“Where did you buy that?” I asked.

“At Printemps, madame the duchess,” she replied, as if she had expected the question, and was prepared with a reply.

“At Printemps! you astonish me.”

“I assure you, madame, I bought it at a low price; it was what is called a misfit.”

“Did it fit you so well?”

“Oh, no, madame the duchess; I altered it myself.”

While looking at it I touched it and half opened the neck to see it better.

“Why,” I said, “it is marked, with the name of Printemps, no doubt, since you bought it there.”

“Yes,” said she, “it had the name of Printemps upon it, but I have effaced it.” At the same time she opened the neck and showed me a little silk band upon which a name, written in gold letters, had been carefully scratched out.

“Why did you scratch out the name,” I asked.

“Alas,” she said, “from vanity. This jacket

appears to have come from a tailor, and I wanted to hide that it had only come from Printemps. I have told madame the truth. I would not deceive her."

Which is the truth? Did she scratch out the name of Printemps or that of the tailor? The *Maison bon Marché*, with its low prices, or that of a great tailor, with its ruinous ones?

But why do I disquiet myself? What does it matter to me? . . . Much. It is important for me to know if I have in my service a liar and a coquette, or merely an able tailoress, who can alter garments to perfection, can make a work of art out of a jacket from a draper's shop. Shall I never know this girl? I doubt it. She does not enlighten me much.

However, this evening she said a droll thing, straight from the heart. She was standing near me, on the balcony, holding in her hand a glass of water I had asked for, and while I was watching the stars rising in the heavens, I said, pointing to a luminous spot near the horizon :

"Look ! there is Venus rising."

"Venus ! Is it as small as that ?" she said.

Why did she think it was larger. She imagined, without doubt, that the goddess of love and beauty occupied a considerable place in the heavens, because of the important part she plays upon the earth.

XIV.

18th July.

FOR the first time for several years I have written nothing in my journal for a fortnight. I have had nothing to write about; no good or new thoughts to inscribe.

To-day I am still short of events and ideas, but it pleases me to relate here the cause of this state of affairs.

As for events, I do not expect them. What events can there be in the quiet, regular life that I lead. I rise about eight o'clock, have my bath, eat my breakfast, make my toilet, walk on foot in the park, have lunch, rest for a while, then drive in the neighborhood, dine, take another walk in the park, read, go to bed and sleep. Every morning commences in the same way, and every evening ends as the previous one.

But why this absolute lack of ideas when I have always had such an active mind? Is it in consequence of my physical existence being so easy, so tranquil, that my mind has become so torpid? My body takes life so easily that my brain must do

likewise. Has not my existence, then, always been what it is now? No. Do I live better than formerly? Yes . . . and it is the fault, the great fault of Louise Bauquet.

I have never even dreamt of such perfect service. She is not a maid, a companion; she is an intelligent, skillful and dutiful slave, such as has never been seen in an Egyptian or Turkish harem. I give no more orders; she foresees my orders, and executes them before I speak. I wish for nothing any more; she wishes for me, before me. I think no longer; she thinks in my place. If, when I wake in the morning, I want air or light, she has divined it. If, on the contrary, I feel inclined to lie in the soft half-light of my room, and think or dream, she seats herself at the foot of the bed and remains motionless until I am completely awake. It is quite oriental. I was quite right in speaking of the harem, for sometimes I am tempted to believe myself some sultana, or at least the first favorite of a pacha. The illusion is much easier, as, following the example of the majority of Turkish ladies, on leaving my bath I am now massaged.

I did not understand being massaged, though I had once been ordered it by my physician, when I spoke to him of my fear of getting too fat. Un-

fortunately good masseuses are very rare in Paris. As to masseurs for ladies! . . . there are plenty of them, and they have many clients, but defend me from them.

After consulting the doctor, without obeying his instructions, I grew thinner. . . . No doubt from fear of the masseurs.

For some time past I have neither gained nor lost flesh. I have remained stationary. However, I have a tendency to gain.

I told Louise Bauquet of my anxiety on the subject, and, like any doctor, she counseled me to be massaged.

"It is very easy to talk," I replied. "Where is the masseuse? I have looked for one before, and could not find one."

"But I massage very well."

"You!"

"I learned at Hammam with a negress."

"And you have attempted it without the negress?"

"Yes, madame the duchess, upon Madame de la Bère, and she found it very beneficial. It was, perhaps, for that reason, that she regretted my departure so much."

"Then you really believe in the influence of massage."

“Yes, when it is properly done, madame the duchess. As to that, madame will judge for herself. If it is not successful she can discontinue it.”

I was willing to try, and it was so successful that I continued it.

She does it to me in the morning about nine o'clock. After leaving my bed, I pass into my bath-room, constructed after my own designs as well as those of my husband. It is a circular apartment, the walls are of rose-colored marble, sustained by little columns, the tops of which are very beautifully sculptured. The light comes from on high, from the cupola, which forms the roof. It might be called a little Grecian temple. “The temple of Venus” the very amorous duke called it, in the old days. A bath, or rather a large shell of black marble sunk into the floor, contrasts prettily with the rose-colored walls, and was destined, as the duke also said; to display the whiteness of my satin-like skin. . . .

Ah! he is always in my mind, the ungrateful one! If he found me so beautiful, why did he deceive me?

Thanks to a perfect system, well carried out, I am able, at any hour, to take a fresh water or sea bath, either hot or cold, without being at the mercy

of the waves or of bad weather. My . . . temple . . . let the name remain, since it was my husband called it so . . . is a great advantage over the ordinary bathing-house, either fixed or on wheels. It gives me the great satisfaction, also, of being able to shelter myself from the indiscreet looks of the curious. I have tried bathing, like everyone else, at Portel, or upon the shore at Boulogne. But it annoyed me too much to notice the number of opera-glasses and even telescopes that were leveled at me. The idle people about did me the honor, it appears, of learning the hour at which I took my bath, and of watching, of spying upon my every movement, so that I soon had to give up the pleasure of the fresh air, the beach and the rolling waves.

Here, under my cupola, no one can see me but my maid, which enables me to dispense with a costume at once ugly and inconvenient, another advantage of using one's own bath-room. One of my friends, however, told me the other day, that she never uncovered or stepped into the bath in presence of her maid, but always attended to herself when bathing. No doubt decency is a very good thing, and I admire it very much, but it does not prevent the lady in question from exposing herself, by going to a ball in such a very low dress

that it is positively indecent, and a thing that I would not venture to do myself. But as regards my bath, I shall not imitate her. Certainly, I would not do as those Roman ladies did when they took their baths, in a state of perfect nudity, before their male slaves, saying : “What does it matter, a slave is not a man.” But there is a great difference between a male slave and my own maid, and I am quite sure I shall not incommode myself on her account. Even when dressed I sometimes blush under the lascivious look of a man ; but with nothing on, I pay no attention to the look of a woman, more particularly when that woman is in my service for the special purpose of attending to my toilet. If in my decency I took alarm at the presence of Louise Bauquet, I should have to give up my massage, and when it is done, as in my case, in order to prevent my getting too stout, it must be general and not partial, it must be done upon the bare skin, and not over tights or fleshings, which was proposed to me once by a certain masseur, who, no doubt, mistook me for a ballet dancer.

From my “temple,” then, in a bathing-gown, I pass into my dressing-room, and, removing my gown, I stretch myself at full length upon a low couch, and Louise Bauquet, squatting or kneeling

upon a cushion by my side, commences the operation.

The first day I was afraid of her hand being too cold. I was wrong, her hand is warm, just the temperature of my own body. I have said it before, this girl knows everything, and what skill, what science she displays. How well she knows how to find every joint, every muscle! How she follows them from their inception to their end, from the top to the bottom, from the head to the feet. She leans upon the palm of my hand, and presses with her fingers. In place of allowing them to glide too quickly, she will stop sometimes upon a certain spot, a spot which is, no doubt, threatened with fat, that she attends to more than other parts, that she presses into more thoroughly. All this is done with such a skillful hand that I do not suffer from it. In fact, it gives me a considerable amount of pleasure. And what strength there is in this little woman, in this little body! A nervous force, without doubt, the sacred fire also, the love of pleasing me, and doing good. At the rate at which she works sometimes, the activity which she displays, I am certain I should be fatigued at the end of five minutes. She can continue the exercise for an hour. Her arms, her hands, are in constant movement, her body vibrates, as she al-

ternately presses heavily or lightly upon me. She works with energy and amination, and yet does not appear to feel it. Her color increases, her eyes become brighter, her nostrils more dilated, her arms, her hands, are never at rest. I am obliged to say to her :

“Rest yourself now, I have had enough for the day.”

The strangest part of it is, that when she stops, I am the one who is fatigued. Yes, it often happens after the operation that I fall asleep upon my couch in the position in which she has left me, upon my back, or leaning upon my side. Instead of going away to take a little rest herself, she remains near me, and watches over my sleep. The East, always the East. During the day she divines if I wish to go for a drive, transmits the order to the coachman, without my having told her. She knows what carriage I wish to go out in, whether open or closed, with two horses or only one, whether landau, barouche, victoria, or basket-carriage. I have only to step into it, to let her conduct me. If I go out lightly clad in the summer mantle she places upon my shoulders, I can be quite certain that it will not be cold during our drive. She can tell the intentions of the sky as well as mine. Perhaps she is in the confidence of

the clerk of the weather. On my return I have dinner. I eat now, with an appetite I have never known before. Is it the massage? I believe, rather, that it is her, always her, who has ordered in my name the dishes that she knows I prefer. I even suspect, in her zeal for my person, that yesterday she went into the kitchen and prepared some lobster à l'Americaine herself, for I have never known my chef, with all his knowledge, prepare it in that style before.

In the evening I no more fatigue my eyes by reading. My companion reads to me, clearly, simply, in a well-toned, sympathetic voice, warming to the subject if it requires warmth. She chooses the book which she judges I shall like the best. Generally she chooses a modern novel, and appears to prefer those that are full of audacious actions, but which are written with sufficient discretion and tact to render them tolerable. There, again, she perfectly understands me without my having had to explain to her. In fact, a woman well-born and honest, but with a certain amount of curiosity, and with a wish to investigate, deciding to instruct herself, at some little sacrifice of decency, in order to know sufficient to enable her to escape all dangers, or to fight against them, and, notwithstanding the attractions of vice, to remain

virtuous, really virtuous. This woman, I say, can follow the idea of the author to the end, to the very last page, if she has it put before her in a veiled manner, even until she touches the facts themselves. But if it is put before her coarsely, in such brutal language as to shock her eyes or her ears, and to revolt her senses, in fact, her very being, she takes fright and shuts the book. It is frequently doing the author an injustice, for his idea, still undecided, would soon have appeared clearly and soundly. A great and good lesson might have been learned from what at first merely appeared a description of voluptuous pleasures ; a moral might have been deduced from that which appeared immoral. Sometimes, too, it is a loss to the fair reader. She might have become interested in a remarkable study of human life, a work of the first order, if the author, in presenting vice as it exists, in its truthful appearance, had written more discreetly, painted his picture with a lighter hand.

Ah, well ! I have managed to write something ; it is certainly nothing clever or new, but it proves to me that my mind awakes at moments, and I am very happy to know it. I know at the same time that I sleep too much, and on looking over this description of how I spend my days, the

cause is explained to me. The long mornings in bed, the bath, the massage, the afternoon siestas, the good feeding, all my desires being foreseen, my caprices being satisfied, in short, the easy life that I lead has finished by killing the activity of my mind. . . . And I conclude as I commenced, without fear of being mistaken this time, it is the fault of Louise Bauquet.

XV.

27th July, morning.

THIS morning, when she came into my bath-room, I said to her :

“No, not yet. I shall give myself a few minutes more.”

“I was about to suggest to madame the duchess,” she replied, “that it will do her no harm to remain in the bath a little longer this thundery weather.”

“There is a storm, then. I thought I saw a flash of lightning some time ago.”

“Oh ! It has been lightning for some time over the sea, and it is rapidly approaching us.”

“Do not go away, then.”

A thunder-storm always makes me a little nervous, even frightened, I admit ; and that is why I asked her to remain near me. As a rule she is not there when I take my bath, she only comes in when I step out of it.

Obeying my order she remained, on this occasion, in the “temple,” but she placed herself discreetly behind me, at the end of the black marble shell, in which I lay extended.



P. 112.—LOUISE BAUQUET WATCHES THE DUCHESS BATHING IN
"THE TEMPLE OF VENUS."

The storm was raging in all its force when I passed into my dressing-room. Louise Bauquet did not believe in deferring, for such a trifle, my daily massage. She appeared to me, on the contrary, to be more active than ever, to give herself more work than usual. Her hands glided more rapidly from one part to another, her fingers at times actually seemed to clutch me. I thought the storm had agitated her, as it had myself, and made her a little nervous. We heard the thunder rumbling around us, then came a hollow sound, and a prolonged roaring, which lost itself in echoes; at another moment, all at once, we heard a sharp, vibrating crash, which rent our ears, and made me start, while the hand of my masseuse stopped upon a certain place, and her fingers pressed into the flesh with such force that I felt her nails. It was massage no longer, it was killing, but when the nerves are over-excited a little pain sometimes does one good.

If we heard the storm, we did not see it, thanks to her care in closing the venetian shutters, and drawing the curtains. My eyes were not troubled, but my head felt heavy in the heat of my dressing-room, impregnated with perfumes and unstoppered scent bottles, bouquets upon the mantelpiece, and upon a table near me, some fresh

flowers gathered in the park this morning. As if all these perfumes were not sufficient, I noticed another coming in strong little whiffs across me whenever her fingers stopped upon my neck, my shoulders or my arms. It was eau d'Espagne, that I was very fond of, and which she was in the habit of pouring into the hollow of her hand at the time of massage. She had, I believe, to-day, used it too freely. Notwithstanding that these surroundings rendered me languid, I remained awake whilst the storm lasted. Soon, however, it died away in the distance, and became lost in the rain. My nerves became calmer, and I fell gradually into a light slumber, while she continued massaging me with her hands, but more gently, with less force. Perhaps the rain had calmed her; perhaps she wished to let me sleep while she continued. I had been for some minutes in this state of half sleep, of torpor, and my eyes were closed.

Suddenly I experienced a slight tickling sensation on the top of my thighs, such as is produced by contact with hair. At first I thought it was my own hair, which being loose and very long, had touched me; but, almost immediately, I felt what appeared to be a hot breath and something moist lightly pressing upon me in the same place. Mechanically, I extended my arms. My hands

encountered the head of Louise Bauquet. I pushed it quickly away, and sitting up, wrapped myself in my bathing-gown, and ran to open the curtains to push back the shutters.

When I turned again she was seated upright, immovable, before the couch, and before I had time to speak, she said to me, in a confused manner :

“I beseech, madame, to pardon me. I was very tired. I finished by becoming sleepy, and my head fell upon the knees of madame the duchess.”

I looked at her for a moment, and said :

“Very good. You may go. I will dress myself.”

I said these words in a tone which did not admit of any reply, and she obeyed, without hesitation.

This is what has occurred. Notwithstanding my dislike to do so, I have written it here, as I have sworn to write everything, as I will write, in this diary, my reflections upon this incident. I shall be able in this way to do my duty, to take a reasonable view of it, and to be just, which I desire more than anything else.

XVI.

25th July, evening.

I MUST first decide in my own mind, whether I can believe what she has told me.

She pretends that she fell asleep, and why not? Had she not the same reason as I had to fall asleep—the storm, the rain which succeeded it, the semi-darkness of my dressing-room, the perfumes, and the flowers? . . . But then I had a long bath. How do I know that she did not take a bath, before I awoke, in the sea or elsewhere? . . . The massage? Ah! well, does not the operator feel the slightly magnetic effect of massage in the same degree as the person operated upon. I think I have heard it said that it fatigues the operator more than the subject. Then it is admissible, even reasonable, to believe that she fell asleep. During the sleep her head had fallen between my thighs, so she says. Let me consider. She was kneeling upon a cushion lower than my couch, close to it, and placed about the middle. To save her the trouble of stretching out her arms I was myself lying extended upon my back at the

edge of the couch, on the side nearest to her. In this position I can see very well that her head, in falling, would of necessity fall upon me above my knees. But I should have felt the blow, the shock. A head, no matter how small it is, weighs something, and when a weight falls upon one's body one perceives it. However, I felt neither blow nor shock, but only, as I have said before, a moist, warm pressure. Does that prove anything? I was sleeping, perhaps, more deeply than I imagined, and I awoke after her head fell upon me. Consequently I should only notice the tickling sensation of her hair upon my skin, and the warmth of her face. Again, how do I know that her head fell upon me all at once. Might it not, in her sleep, have inclined gradually to me, and finally rested upon me, in which case I should have felt the contact alone.

All this is very possible. Then why should I not believe her? Why should I make a crime out of a simple inability to resist sleep?

Without doubt. But something tells me that she told me an untruth. I will keep nothing back. Am I not alone face to face with myself? Ought I to dissimulate, to hide one of my thoughts, one of my sensations, about that which I believe occurred? Well, then, I thought I felt not only

the heat of her head leaning upon me, but the heat of her lips, and — I will say it, the bite of a kiss.

She had dared to take advantage of my sleep to kiss me !

Let me be calm ! If I write all my reflections, one after the other, if I think, with my pen in my hand, it is in order to keep myself cool.

I have admitted that her head might naturally have fallen upon me. In what position was she ? In front, with her full face upon me. It was her forehead, cheeks and mouth, then, that pressed upon me, and, if I felt the heat of her lips, would it not be very natural ?

But the kiss ? It is possible for me to have only imagined it, the contact of her lips is hardly sufficient proof. And, if she slept herself, as I have just now suggested, has it never happened before that in one's sleep and dreams that one gives an imaginary kiss ? It loses itself in vacuum, if there is a vacuum. It does not lose itself if some one or some thing encounters it upon its road. Before I can judge, however, in this matter, I must examine it from all sides, and having now looked at it from the sleeping point, and that of the involuntary kiss, I must

now see what proof I have that she did it intentionally.

Since Louise Bauquet arrived here in the double capacity of maid and companion, how has she lived ? If I may so express myself. She has taken a part in both my physical and mental life. Of my physical existence I have allowed her, without dreaming of harm, without even thinking of it, the most complete knowledge. A painter would say that I had posed before her as a model, then is it not the fault of the model, of the model only, if she has been inspired with admiration for it. Mentally, in exchanging ideas with my companion, I have still posed before her, whilst showing her my mind and in giving her instruction. In some cases she has, no doubt, been dazzled by my gossip, and embarrassed by my teachings, and yet, she has admired me.

Admitting, then, that she admires me. Well, is not a kiss one of the visible forms of admiration ? Is one not often tempted to embrace those that are beautiful, or those that have done a grand or noble action ? “Ah ! he is a brave man ! I would like to embrace him if I could !” one cries. For myself, I have often said to a friend, or to some beautiful young girl : “My darling girl, you are too beautiful to-day, I must give you a kiss,”

and, she offered me her forehead, or her cheeks. Yes, but I have never tendered anything to Louise Bauquet. I have never given. She has taken.

Under what conditions has she taken ? During my sleep. Although this appeared to me at first an aggravating circumstance, it really becomes an extenuating one. She did not want to show me any disrespect, since she was in hopes I should not know of it.

But, then, it was not my forehead, it was not my cheek that she kissed. Truly, I should not have given them to her ; she would not have dared to kiss them. But she slyly kissed that part of me which she was able to reach, that was near her mouth. It is thus that a slave kisses her mistress, and, I have said before, that she has made herself my slave.

Shall I, then, deprive myself of her service, of her devotion, merely for one moment's forgetfulness, provoked by the enervating effects of the storm and the heat, by the intoxicating smell of perfume, even by myself, who have allowed her to admire me — I see it now — with too much license ?

All these reflections are now written here, in my journal. I should be able to make an immediate decision, to ring for Louise Bauquet, and either say to her : "Return to Paris, I will not keep

you ;” or, “I forgive you, this time, but for the future be more careful.” However, I shall not ring now. I will pass to-day alone. I will read over my notes again to-morrow morning, when I am cool, and then I will decide. One thing I will decide now : I will give up the massage. It is too enervating, both for the operator and the subject. I will renounce also my Oriental life ; I will become again a woman of the West and North, in as much as at this moment I am a woman of Boulogne.

XVII.

26th July.

HAVING decided to lead a more active life, I rose early this morning without any assistance. When Louise Bauquet came into my room, with its large windows overlooking the sea, I said to her, in my natural voice, without irritation, but without much softness :

“Prepare what I require, and leave it out in my dressing-room. I will dress myself.”

I believe she was desirous of speaking to me. I turned my back upon her, and went out upon the balcony. She appeared uneasy, and no doubt wished to know what I thought to-day of the insult she had offered me yesterday ; what resolution I had taken in the matter ; in short, whether I had resolved to pardon her or to treat her with rigor. But I will decide that after I have read again the few last pages of this journal, as I have promised myself, and have taken one of those long walks which refresh the mind and enable it to see more clearly.

Although I had told her that I would dress

myself, she was still in my dressing-room when I went in, moving about from one place to another, placing this thing here, and that there, unable, apparently, to leave the room ; unable to leave me without attending to me as usual.

Without appearing to notice her presence I arranged the fresh flowers she had cut for me, in the vases on the mantel-piece ; but, involuntarily, I glanced at her occasionally. She had evidently slept badly ; her slight figure looked thinner than usual, her face very haggard. She had a disheartened, even suffering, appearance ; her walk, so light, so lively, generally, was slow and straggling. The thought that she has displeased me, that I am going to dismiss her, is tormenting her almost to the point of making her ill. Is she truly attached to me ? It is scarcely probable. In six weeks one cannot form a very strong attachment. Love only, it is said, comes suddenly ; it is born very quickly in certain foolish hearts. But love does not exist between women, between a servant and her mistress.

The flowers being arranged in the vases, I moved toward the toilet-table. Then, taking courage, in a low voice, she said to me :

“Will not madame the duchess allow me to do her hair ?”

“No, not to-day. You can retire.”

She went out sadly, without a word, with the same slow step. I made my toilet rapidly, and in half an hour, seated by the window, I was reading again that which I had written yesterday. All my reflections appear to me just. I believe they are founded upon the truth. In fact, I have almost decided. Even last night I thought of looking over the matter, of forgiving her. I am this morning of the same opinion; and do not think I shall say anything more to her about it. . . . If I speak of it, I shall appear to attach importance to it, and then I must show myself severe. No, I will allow her to resume her service near me, but will modify it, simplify it. I will keep her, in a word, at a distance, and not allow her another opportunity of letting her head fall upon me, when she goes to sleep, and give her less chance, when awake, of showing her admiration.

Now, I will go out, in order to follow out my programme to the end, and take a long walk, and on my return, if my ideas are not modified, I will commence once more, review and correct my life.

XVIII.

26th July, evening.

IF I am able, this time, to fix my ideas, to reproduce exactly the conversations that I have just had, to recount the events that have taken place, I shall have given a great proof of my will, of my empire over myself. I wish to give myself that proof.

Having passed through the park gates, in place of going into the country, I took the road to Boulogne, where I had some purchases to make, some little things I had forgotten in Paris. It is a long road, and slightly fatiguing, but I thus replace the massage with the walk, which I have now every reason to believe is superior to it. Having arrived at the town, about ten o'clock, I crossed the iron bridge and Frederick Sauvage square, and I was upon the point of entering Faidherte street, when I perceived, at a window upon the first floor of the Hotel Christol, who? Blazac!

As he had his glasses on, he saw me and recognized me. We exchanged looks of recognition.

Then he left his window quickly, came downstairs, and joined me.

“What ! are you here, cousin ?”

“There is nothing surprising in that. I live in the country. . . . It is I, rather, that should be astonished at seeing you here.”

“Why ? did I not tell you that I intended to depart for the sea, or the waters, and I chose the sea.”

“And you have been at Boulogne since our last meeting.”

“Yes, at the Hotel Christol, as you see, the great house for the English aristocracy, two steps from the railway, if I wish to go back to Paris, and facing the packet boats, if I take a fancy to go to London. And from my window, cousin, at which you surprised me, what a lovely view ! The port, the sea, the winding river, and the green hills.”

“How poetical ! It is not natural in you. There is something behind all this. . . . And then, why do you vaunt the Hotel Christol to me, who resided in it with the duke, when our villa at the “Ruins” was being repaired. . . . You know the “Ruins” there, facing you upon the hill.”

“Yes, I know it.”

“And has the idea never come into your head to pay me a visit ?”

“It was impossible, cousin. . . . I am not alone at Boulogne.”

“Oh! Very good. I can now explain your poetical sentiments. Another love. Mélinite always?”

“No; Mélinite no more, I have replaced her with Bellite.”

“Bellite, Bellite; I have heard this name.”

“It is the name of a new explosive . . . a brunette that I followed to the Casino at Boulogne the night of my arrival.”

“I know it; I have played there.”

“And you have won?”

“Once or twice.”

“Ah, well, my brunette did not win. She lost all her money, and she was in grief—in such grief. That touched me. I said to her: ‘Mademoiselle, I beseech you not to tear your hair. It is such a beautiful shade. Come and take a turn with me instead.’ A woman who has lost her last louis is generally willing to do that. We walked about for some time, and I perceived that this child, this interesting girl, was really very ladylike, and quite worthy of being launched.”

“Yet another!”

“What would you have, cousin, I have only had two passions in my life—launching and chemistry.

. . . . At first sight they do not resemble each other much ; but you understand me, cousin."

"Perfectly, Mélinite, Bellite."

"Exactly. . . . Well, the next day she said to me : 'Boulogne pleases me very much. I could be content to finish the summer here with you.'"

"What, so soon ?"

"Yes. So I told her I liked Boulogne also, and would take her to live with me. Then I rented rooms at the Hotel Christol, allowing myself to pass as a married man. . . . It is necessary to respect the proprieties in hotels of the first class. . . . And I am here installed with Bellite. She still calls herself Rose Miron. But I proposed to her to change her name to Bellite. She replied : 'What does it matter to me ?' So that in Paris, for the launch, she will be called Bellite."

"In giving her this surname you have, no doubt, your reasons ?"

"My reasons ? Certainly. I will tell them to you, if you wish it."

"I wish it ; if you do not forget . . ."

"Oh ! I will say nothing you will not care to listen to."

"Speak, then. Only let us walk on a little ; you are keeping me here in the same place."

“It is you, rather, who are keeping me. You tell me to speak.”

“Because you amuse me. One has so few amusements at the sea-side.”

I walked in the direction of the quay, following the channel along by the fishing-boats, and as Blazac walked by my side, he continued :

“I have given her this surname because she is an explosive the nature of which you can form no idea.”

“It is plain I have not the least idea of it.”

“It is composed of nitrate of ammonia and of dinitro-benzine—a most formidable compound, destined to destroy all the others. When she is launched, one can wish for nothing better, not only in France, but everywhere. The Germans will try to take her from me. The English also. I have perceived it already at the Hotel Christol. She is of a yellowish color, the shade of an Indian or of a mulatto. She has taste, much taste. She is nearly dry to the touch.”

“Blazac !”

“Well ! what is it, cousin ? It is not the first time that you have seen me mix up women and chemistry together ? Is it my fault if I confound the bellite invented by Mon. Carl Lamm with my Bellite, that I discovered myself ? She resembles

the other much ; in touch, in color, in her explosive powers !

“What enthusiasm ! In you, who formerly only swore by Mélinite.”

“I swear by her no more, since I found out she had deceived me.”

“Are you not accustomed to that ?”

“It is not of that which I speak. She deceived me in the color of her hair, and I shall not forgive her ; I who gave her everything, who presented her to my friends as a brunette.”

“And is she not one ?” I cried, astonished.

“She was never one, and I allowed myself to be deceived by her, I, Blazac ! . . . It is true that her wigs were very well made. She had them in every form, for all occasions, all circumstances ; a wig for the town, a wig for the country, one for the day, and one for the night. . . . Oh ! her wig for the night was a dream ! I, who believed that she had just curled, in my honor, her beautiful black hair, when she had merely changed her wig. . . . What a superb collection !

“She showed them to you ?”

“She kept them hidden from me, but I discovered them.”

“When ?”

“The day on which I saw you last, cousin. It

is a date I shall not forget. On leaving the agency office, where I had gone to find her a maid, . . . you know, . . . I returned to her house to give her an account of my mission. . . . She was not there. . . . I searched for some paper to write her a note. There was neither paper nor pen in the salon. I went into her dressing-room. . . . Nothing there. . . . I opened a wardrobe, a drawer, another wardrobe, another drawer, and I ended by finding, instead of ink and paper, the collection of wigs. . . . At first I was astonished, angry, then ecstatic at the sight of these works of art. I was still admiring them when she entered, and surprised me before the opened wardrobe. . . .

“ ‘Miserable creature,’ I cried, ‘you are a false brunette !’

“ ‘Most false,’ she replied, with that presence of mind so remarkable in her.

“ ‘Why have you deceived me ?’

“ ‘You love brunettes ; you swear by nothing else, and I wanted you to love me, my angel !’

“ ‘Oh ! between us, that kind of talk is useless. Find some other reason.’

“ ‘Very well, you were looking for a brunette to launch her. I made myself a brunette in order to be launched.’ ”

I stopped upon the jetty that we had come to, and I said to Blazac :

“If she is not a brunette, what is the exact shade of her hair ?”

“Fair, very fair, not at all brown. . . .”

“Oh ! this time I am quite sure of not being deceived. It was her own hair. For I pulled it, as I pull every evening at Bellite’s hair. I do not wish to be mocked at by a second explosive.”

“And after you had discovered the truth,” asked I, interrupting him, “you left her without giving her an account of your mission ?”

“No ; she asked me about it ; I replied angrily ; but I did reply.”

“You did not tell her, I suppose, that I was also seeking for a maid ; that you met me in front of the agency ?”

“I might have told her. Since that evening that she saw you at the Bois she was always speaking of you, and, naturally . . .”

I was seated upon the end of the jetty, on a circular bench, and questioned him again :

“It was on the evening of your discovery that you left for Boulogne ?”

“The next day.”

“For the only reason that your ‘Tendresse’ was fair, instead of being dark ?”

“Not exactly. . . . To you, cousin, from whom I hide nothing, I will even admit that she pleased me with her natural hair. It rendered her unrecognizable, and made her an absolutely new woman. I, who love a change, rather liked it.”

“Then why did you leave?”

“It was no use my remaining. She had gone herself, before me.”

“Without saying where she was going?”

“Without saying anything. She is the greatest deceiver I know.”

“And you have never tried to rejoin her? You do not suspect any place where you might find her?”

“No; a new caprice seized her, without doubt. A passion, perhaps; she is quite capable of it. She will return when her passion is satisfied. If she cannot satisfy it she will never return.”

“Why?”

“Because there will be an explosion. She will blow herself up, as I told you before, on the day when she cannot blow up the other.”

I allowed the boat from Folkestone to pass, that was whistling at the entrance to the port; then, in an undifferent tone, as if Mélinite had no more interest for me, I said:

"Do you know, by chance, such a name as Madame de la Bère?"

"Perfectly. Is she here? Then Mélinite is not far off."

"She knows her then?"

"She know her! Well, very intimately. It was at the house of Madame de la Bère that I first met Louise Bauquet. What is the matter, cousin?"

"Nothing. The eddy of the steamboat made this wooden jetty shake, and I thought it was going to fall. . . . Who is this Louise Bauquet of whom you speak to me now for the first time?"

"It is Mélinite before the baptism, my baptism."

"Oh! indeed. Have you seen the husband of Madame de la Bère?"

"She is not married."

"She has some children, however?"

"Children, impossible! I see, you are speaking of another Madame de la Bère. The name is common enough. . . . The one I mean lives at No. 1 François street, second floor."

"It was at her house, you tell me, that you first saw Louise Bauquet?"

"Yes. She was her maid. She was hidden there. But I always finish by discovering everything, even wigs. I worked, as you already know, in order to gain a triumph for black hair. The

maid was dark, peculiar also, very piquant, much more original than her mistress, and I carried her off, to the great despair of the other."

"Why should it make her despair?"

"Oh! for reasons that I am not able to tell you. Do not insist. I know how far I can go with a woman who is not a prude, like yourself, and also where to stop with an honest woman, also like yourself, cousin. Otherwise, Madame de la Bère was quickly consoled, for Louise Bauquet launched, thanks to me, rich, thanks to another, soon took it into her head to return to François street, No. 1, and to re-enter into the service of her blonde."

"What! notwithstanding the million, always a maid."

"She has a great liking for the business. Besides, with Madame de la Bère, the maid is as much as the mistress; in fact, they take it by turns. Then it is an intermittent service. Louise Bauquet, when the fit seizes her, does not trouble herself, but takes off her apron and flies to another shore, as at this moment. Pardon me, cousin, do you ever eat luncheon?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because you do not seem to know it is one o'clock."

"Already!"

"Thanks. That proves that I have not wearied you. But Bellite, who was still asleep when you passed the hotel, will be awake now and waiting lunch for me."

"Go quickly, then, and rejoin her. Shall I see you some day at the 'Ruins'?"

"I am afraid not. You understand, with explosives it is necessary to be prudent; one must never leave them long alone. . . . Adieu, cousin."

As soon as he had gone, I hired a conveyance. I have now only one thought: to chase this wretch from my house as quickly as possible.

XIX.

How to discharge her? Under what pretext? The pretext that she gave me herself yesterday. I have not forgiven her yet. She saw that last night and this morning. Decidedly I will not forgive her, and will send her away. It is very simple. What necessity is there for me to tell her that I know who she is, to have explanations, discussions, to commit myself with her? Can I be answerable for myself? Shall I not finish by crying out: "You have killed my husband, infamous creature?"

I do not wish her to know it. She must be kept in ignorance that the Baron de Virmeux was the Duke de X. . . . Both out of respect to himself and me, he had hidden his name, his true title, and I have no right to mention it.

Oh! my God, am I going to think and decide again in advance what I shall say, what I shall do? Of what use were my resolutions of yesterday and to-day. I was going to pardon her, to keep her near me. A few minutes' conversation with Blazac has destroyed all that, has enlightened me. By

holding a conversation with her I might find out the true cause of the death of my husband. . . . If I lead her on to tell me how she made him love her . . . how it was he deceived me, and killed himself for her, ought I to hesitate? No; I do not think so.

I am wrong to provoke her confidences; to speak of him with her; to suffer such a mouth to tell me the secret of the man I loved so much. I prefer to know nothing, nothing.

Then if I have decided not to hear her, and if I fear to question her, if I doubt my own power, why need I see her? why need I dismiss her myself? Is not my steward here, he can send her away for me. Shall I incommode myself for her? No, certainly not.

Yet, if she departs without having spoken to me, I shall never know why she entered my service, why she has made herself my servant, my slave. In that which Blazac told me there are some things I do not understand. . . . I should like to understand them.

Ah! it is too strong for me. Come what may . . . I will call her.

.
She came in, and immediately, without raising

my eyes . . . for I dread to look at her, I seem to fear her . . . I said :

“I have reflected. I shall not keep you in my service. Make up your accounts and leave at once.”

She remained silent for a moment, then she said, in a firm voice :

“Will madame permit me to ask the cause of this sudden dismissal ?”

“I will not permit it.”

“It is very hard. Madame the duchess is treating me as she might hesitate to treat a simple maid, and yet, she has been willing to elevate me to another office nearer to her. A sort of companion as I have been, is it not right that I should be told the cause of my discharge.”

“Very well, since you wish to know it, I discharge you because yesterday you forgot yourself, you showed yourself wanting in respect to me.”

“Quite unwillingly, and I am very sorry for it. Alas, as I have had the honor of telling madame, I could not help falling asleep.”

“I do not believe you were asleep.”

“What does madame believe about it, then?”

What could I reply ? Could I reproach her with kissing me. Discuss with her if she had or had not done so ? Ah ! the thought that her lips

have touched me is more odious still since I have learned who she is. I do not wish to admit even to myself a kiss from such a mouth, and I would not admit it to her.

Then, seeing that she would insist upon knowing the cause of her dismissal, and incapable of containing myself any longer, I decided to finish it, and raising my eyes and looking her full in the face, I said to her, without lowering my voice :

“I dismiss you because you are not an honest girl. You were formerly called Mélinite.”

She turned pale, then recovering herself, she said :

“Who has said that ?”

“One of my relations, M. de Blazac.”

“He knows I am here, then ?”

“No, happily.”

“How is it then, madame, that he spoke to you of a woman like myself ?”

“It pleased me to question him about this Mélinite, with whom I had seen him speak, and I learned that her true name was Louise Bauquet.”

“He told you also that Louise Bauquet was a lady’s maid ?”

“Certainly.”

“Then what do you reproach me with, madame the duchess ?”

“What do I reproach you with! Of having unworthily deceived me.”

“Deceived you! I came to your house under the name of Louise Bauquet, which is my true name. You must admit it yourself, madame. I told you that I had served in several houses. Which is true. My references, and you know they are not false ones, establish the fact. I told you that I was in the service of Madame de la Bère. Which is also true.”

“You dare to speak to me of that woman!”

“Why not?”

“You gave me her name as that of a married woman, a mother, a respectable person, and she is nothing of the kind.”

“Mon Dieu, madame, my references did not satisfy you. You required some verbal reference. I referred you to the person who knows me best, and told you of her respectability, in order that you should place more faith in what she told you.”

“More faith in her lies!”

“She believed every good thing that she said of me, even more, perhaps. She told you that I was an excellent maid. Madame the duchess has told me herself, since I have been here, that she never has been so well served before. I believe that Madame de la Bère even said that she regretted my

leaving her ; in truth, she ought to regret my absence. For the rest, I used a ruse, a subterfuge, which I may be pardoned. I used it for an honorable end."

"You !"

"Without doubt. I wished to change my existence, to work, to gain my living honestly, and from Mélinite to become again Louise Bauquet."

"And you have chosen my house for this transformation ? What was your reason ?"

"M. de Blazac committed the indiscretion of telling me that his cousin, a great lady, a well-known duchess, wanted a maid. I immediately felt a great desire, great curiosity, to obtain the place, and I did what I thought best to secure it."

"Yes, you passed yourself off as an honest girl."

"Honest as a servant, yes. I did not speak of anything else. Madame the duchess will recollect she did not question me upon my morality. She knows perfectly well what people say in such a case. Where is the maid who, wishing to obtain a place, would declare that her conduct left anything to be desired ? Generally, however, she has either a little or big flirtation with the steward or first coachman if she respects herself ; with the footman if she is not so particular. But I have

none of these faults to reproach myself with. The men in the house, my colleagues, do not exist for me. I place my affections higher. That should be placed to my credit. Is it not better to have been the favorite of M. de Blazac, madame's cousin, than to have been the well-beloved of the steward? I have also conducted my little affairs with a certain discretion. I did not choose to compromise M. de Blazac with his relations by avowing my connection with him. It has pleased him to speak of it. At the same time I do not repent my discretion."

She said all these things, with her eyes lowered, in a respectful attitude, in a soft voice, as if she had done nothing wrong. And, notwithstanding my disgust, I allowed her to continue, because I felt assured she would finish by approaching the subject which alone interested me, and which I had no longer the courage to keep her from. Obligated to be respectful, to keep herself in check since she had been with me, in consequence of her position, she felt a certain pleasure, involuntary perhaps, in showing herself less respectful, less reserved, in speaking, instead of listening. In telling her thoughts, or, rather, a portion of them, Louise Bauquet gradually disappeared, and Mélinite, the courtesan, with her effrontery, her audac-

ity and her cynicism, came into sight. She resembled the actress who, after playing the role of innocence, quits the stage, throws off her white robe, puts on her rouge, and assumes with joy her ordinary life, which, often, has nothing innocent in it.

In order to arrive at my design, to push my advantage, I said to her, in reply to her last speech :

“It is true that I did not question your morality, I gave you that much credit. But you did not, on that account, deceive me less, respecting your true position, your name, and qualities. You gave me to understand that you were in service as a maid, while you had not been one for a long time.”

“Have I not the right to resume my old business, and ought I to be reproached for doing so ? It happens that a lady’s maid becomes a loose woman in order to make money. In my case, I, a courtesan, become again a maid, to make less money, but to earn it honestly. Is it not more moral ?”

I raised my head and ventured to say to her :

“You have no necessity to make money. You are rich.”

“Ah ! Blazac has told you that also ?”

“Yes, he told me that the Baron de Vermeux gave you a million francs.”



P. 113.—LOUISE BAUQUET ABOUT TO MASSAGE THE DUCHESS.

“He told you the truth. But as I have not spent the money, as I have not touched it, as, perhaps, I shall never use it, it is the same as if I had never received it.”

“Perhaps you fear it may burn your fingers?”

“Not at all. A million never burns the fingers of its owner; it tickles them agreeably, it caresses them. And, for that matter, I did not obtain it in the way that is commonly imagined. Ah! if I might only tell the tale. . . . It is as amusing, and is not more immoral than a romance, the last one, for instance, that I had the honor to read to madame the duchess.”

“Well, relate it, then. Do not incommode yourself. I have already listened to you for one hour. But I want no more tokens of respect from you. No more of madame the duchess. I can dispense with it from you. You are no longer in my service. Your name is no longer Louise Bauquet, the maid. Your name is Mélinite, a courtesan. Let it be so. . . . At least, it will instruct me. I shall have read one more bad book, but a true book, a living book. I shall have satisfied this unhealthy curiosity, which, to our shame, sometimes torments women like myself. . . . I will listen to you.”

This disdain, this hardness, had no power to stop her, to make her renounce the permission I

had given her. My instinct told me that a creature such as this, a courtesan, a loose woman, would experience a savage joy in unveiling, in showing herself in her true colors to an honest woman.

“This is what I am. I know you well. I can surpass you. . . . This is what I can do ; this is the way in which I understand the matter. Women like yourself understand nothing. Even the men leave your side to run to us, and give themselves to us body and soul.”

What men do matters little to me. But I want to know what this woman did to one of them — to my husband ; how it was that he shot himself for her sake, . . . and at last I am about to learn.

XX.

I AM going to try to recall, not only the meaning of her words, but the words themselves in all their nakedness. With her tact, her habitual ingenuity, she could have made me understand the most difficult things without using coarse language. But abusing, on the contrary, the liberty I had given her, it pleased her to wound my ears, to make me blush. She hoped, perhaps, by speaking to me in her own language to raise herself to my level, or to lower me to her own. She was mistaken. It would certainly have lowered me if I had taken any pleasure in hearing her, but I endured so much during her recital that I deserve forgiveness for having listened to her until the end.

“It was owing to Blazac,” she commenced, “that I did not remain a lady’s maid all my life. It is a good position, when one is with a young and beautiful mistress. Pretty women are easier to live with than ugly or clever women. I have always tried to improve myself, to talk as they

talk, and to carry myself as they do, in short, to get as much instruction from them as possible."

"It has not been very difficult for you to do this," I observed.

"I have always found that," she replied; "and when my mistresses have had nothing more to teach me, I have left them; but they have always been so satisfied with my services, that I have received good testimonials. I believe I have left pleasant memories in every house I have lived in."

"They are numerous?"

"At least twenty: theatrical women, both stars and otherwise; people of little distinction and people of great distinction; citizens' wives, both with and without lovers; women of the world of every description. I have known them all. There was only a great lady wanting. That is why I entered the service of madame the duchess."

"You can leave, then, without much regret. I have completed your collection."

"Oh! my regret will be very great. I have only passed a month here, and I have not had time to make myself appreciated as I deserve. I still hope that madame . . ."

"I shall be obliged," I said, interrupting her, "if you will proceed more quickly, and come to the

time when you changed your profession. That of a maid interests me but little."

"I will tell you, then," she said, without showing any emotion, without appearing hurt at my words. "It happened in this way: Blazac, who was paying his attentions to Madame de la Bère . . . and with very little success, for I was there to defend her, and when I am near lovers find themselves out in their calculations . . . Blazac, I say, was seeking a brunette, to launch her, carrying out his harmless mania for launching girls. He believed me to be a brunette; I was at that time, in order to contrast better with my fair mistress, who loved a contrast. He offered to give me a modest establishment, whilst awaiting the high destiny which, he said, was certainly reserved for me. I hesitated. I had never had a lover, and for the first I should have preferred a man of a different appearance. I said to him: 'My little man, you are not the one that can make me alter the bad opinion I have of your sex.' Yes, it is true; instinctively I had a horror of men, before knowing them. This has not changed since I have known them."

She stopped to take breath, for she had been speaking quickly the last few moments. It was thus that she conformed to my recommendation —

the same lengthy details, with a more rapid utterance.

“However,” she continued, “the modest establishment—above all, the high destiny—which Blazac promised ended by tempting me. I followed his advice. . . . Ah! I was not mistaken. He could not overcome my instinctive repugnance and the ideas which had been implanted in me by most of my mistresses—women of experience, who spoke from their knowledge acquired in a number of comparative studies.”

She looked at me to judge, no doubt, of the effect produced upon me by this foolish and affected phrase. I did not appear to notice it, however, and she continued :

“Blazac is a good boy, clever and amusing. He is never troublesome or jealous, although he has a right to be, for he treats his women well. But what a lover! Such softness, such caresses, such silliness, but nothing serious. He could not warm me, I remained like ice, yet he baptized me with the name of Mélinite. Why? He explained the reason to me one day in a moment of confidence, of truthfulness. ‘I had several motives,’ he said, ‘in calling you by this name. You are not inflammable with me, it is true, but that does not prove that you will never burn up, and explode

with others. Like the true mélinite, it is necessary for you to be under certain conditions before igniting, and at some time you will find yourself under those conditions, you may be certain. My second motive was a personal one : in making you known as an explosive, I gave, at the same time, a high idea of my resisting strength. People will say : What a wonderful organization has Blazac ! He must have nerves of iron, a frame of steel, to be safe with such a woman. This surname will also assist your launch. Men are very fond of women that are reputed to be inflammable. They take for passion that which is only natural temperament. They believe they are loved for themselves, when they are only loved, in a general way, for their sex and their virility.'

"Such were the little lectures your cousin read me. They were not badly reasoned. At the end of six weeks I found myself launched, and well launched, before all Paris. Then Blazac gave me this last counsel :

" 'Do not have any lovers unless they are of distinction and wealth, always try to make them pay a great price. If you occasionally have a caprice for a poor man, love him freely for nothing, work for glory. Your motto should be "much or

nothing.” As I am not much, I shall bid you good-by.’

“‘You forget,’ I said, ‘the other part of the device — nothing.’

“‘Thank you, but you are not rich enough yet to show your gratitude. You would be wasting time that you can employ better. I shall return in a year’s time.’

“He departed, and I am waiting a year before seeing him again.”

I felt, now, that she was touching upon a chapter in her life that was of personal interest to me. Therefore I listened with patience, with coolness, without protest, to this wordy cynic. Emboldened by the attention with which I appeared to listen to her, or fatigued, perhaps, she half-seated herself upon the arm of a large chair, I suppose because she did not dare to seat herself entirely, from some slight remaining sense of decency.

“Notwithstanding the absence of Blazac,” she continued, “this year has passed very quickly. I have been so much occupied, so run after, my house always full, from one day to another, although I had taken a much larger one. But it is indispensable in our days to keep up a great appearance if one wishes to remain in the first flight. However, notwithstanding the number and the choice

that I have had, I have not changed my opinion of the men. Not one of them has inspired me with passion. How selfish they are in their love — all for them, nothing for us — how badly they understand us. They do not know, or they pretend not to, that, as a rule their thirst is satisfied, appeased, when ours just commences to make itself felt. They empty the cup at a draught, while we have only wet our lips. If, in desperation, as a last hope, we murmur : ‘That which you have drank appears very good, we should like to taste it in our turn,’ they reply : ‘We are sorry, there is no more,’ and we have to remain thirsty.

She made use of some expressions now, and conducted herself in such a way that I said to her :

“Go on with your story, and make haste ! What do I care for your thirst, your cup, and your lips !”

Alas, it was not nearly finished ; I had to listen to a great deal more yet.

She commenced walking about the room, and continued :

“Let us say, however, that some women empty the cup of pleasure at the same time as their lover or husband. That is simply a question of good or bad luck. I compare love to a roulette table, thirty-six numbers and a naught. A player throws

her money upon a number ; it wins and she is happy. Another places her money upon many numbers and loses. Is it not bad luck ? Ah ! well, that is exactly what has happened to me. I can never find a winning number, a man that I can love."

My patience was now exhausted, and I could not help saying to her :

"Excuse me, you told me your life was as amusing as a romance, and I gave you permission to relate it to me. But a romance has an end. The author has no right to put his facts on one side in order to enter into a dissertation that has no end. I must ask you to say no more or keep to the facts of your story."

"I will keep to them, madame," she replied. "I have now come to the million that the Baron de Vermeux gave me."

XXI.

SHE stood upright now, facing my easy-chair, her back leaning against the mantelpiece, while I, to conceal my agitation, took up my fancy work and commenced to work upon it.

“It was from the proscenium on the ground floor of the little Novelties Theatre, that I first saw the Baron de Virmeux. He was with the Marquis de B., who had been presented to me some days before, at a house-warming given by one of my friends. I was by myself, facing these gentlemen. Madame de la Bère should have accompanied me, but she was not feeling well, and I did not mind going to the theatre alone, as I felt certain that I should find some one I knew there. I was mistaken ; there was no one in the stalls, no one in the boxes, except the marquis, and he did not seem disposed to recognize me. I had a great desire, however, that he should ; not for himself, though he was very nice, but on account of his friend, whom I liked much better, at first sight.”

She approached nearer to me, and said to me, more familiarly than she had yet dared to :

“Imagine to yourself, duchess, a man from thirty-two to thirty-five years of age, tall and slender, and of a very distinguished appearance; a lofty forehead, with very soft, intelligent eyes; a straight nose, slightly arched, an aristocratic nose; a rather disdainful, well-cut mouth, framed with a thick, fair mustache, and with a beautiful pointed beard. That which struck me most of all was his grand air, his fine figure, with a peculiar, original, perhaps I might call it untamed, appearance about him. He was evidently a man of the world, but of a world very superior to any that I was acquainted with. In this novel admiration, then . . . for it was the first time in my life that I had been enamored of a man’s face; I have always found them ugly in my eyes, and not to my taste . . . in my new admiration, then, I said to myself: ‘It is a foreign prince, a grand duke, or perhaps a sovereign from the North, traveling incognito, and the Marquis de B. is showing him Paris. I should like to show him my part of it. I would receive him with all the honors due to him.’ But the curtain fell, and neither the marquis, the prince, grand duke or sovereign even glanced at me. They remained seated in their box, without appearing even to notice that my opera-glass was continually leveled at them.

“This complete indifference annoyed me. I had not been accustomed to it since Blazac had launched me. I am not beautiful, and I know it. However, as a rule, I produce a strong impression upon men. Why? I do not know. I merely state the fact. My lively air, my dilated and quivering nostrils, my mouth, generally half open, seems to promise a good deal they say. I have also, it appears, something magnetic, something hypnotic in my eyes; my look attracts the looks of others. As on this occasion it had absolutely no effect, I said to myself: ‘I must do something, I must use all my power, must make a great effort.’

“This great effort consisted in making the visit they would not make, in passing from my box to theirs, and meeting them face to face. A little diplomacy enabled me to do this, and I have no lack of it. I left my box. I crossed the corridor. I arrived before the door of the two recluses. I opened it and walked in, as if I had been expected. They could not avoid showing their astonishment. I think I remarked that they even frowned. However, as they were thorough gentlemen, they rose and bowed.

“‘I must ask you to pardon my indiscretion,’ I said, ‘but I was alone over there and you are alone

here. We are in a little theatre, upon neutral ground, as it were, where certain liberties may be excused, and I think, marquis, that you owe me a forfeit.'

" 'It is true,' he cried, 'the other evening, at the party, I made a wager with you that I have lost. Pardon my forgetfulness.'

" 'Are you disposed to pay it to-day ?'

" 'Certainly.'

" 'Ah, then, with your permission, introduce me to your friend,' . . . and I designated his companion.

"He took me by the hand very gallantly, and, with a smile, he said, 'Allow me to introduce Mademoiselle Mélinite.' This did not suffice me. 'And will you not introduce the gentleman also ?' I asked. After a moment's hesitation he exchanged a look with . . . the other, and finished by saying, 'My friend, the Baron de Virmeux.' What, he was only a baron, and I had taken him for . . .

"I have never been able to find out if I was deceived. In any case, if he had another name, another title, he hid it very adroitly. I might, perhaps, have found out the truth, by taking the trouble. But I am not curious in such a useless, little, common fashion. I might have had him followed, but I think it a low thing to do. I knew

no one to ask about him. He never met either a man or woman at my house. He took his precautions, and I took mine, in order to please him. We always met at a quiet time, in the early evening, when my quarter is deserted. Ah, if I had met him in the street, in the Bois, or at the theatre, or when Blazac, who knows all Paris, had been at my side, I should soon have known who he was. But he avoided meeting me, and as to Blazac, I saw him no more."

She perceived that I was listening attentively to what she said, and her desire to shine before me was doubtless increased. She need not have given herself any trouble, every word that she spoke now, went straight to my heart.

"The curtain rose during my presentation," she continued, "and I remained seated in the back of the box.

"But I was desirous to repay the hospitality, slightly forced, no doubt, of these gentlemen, and to please them with my conversation, for the obscurity prevented my seducing them in any other way, and I soon perceived that I was producing some slight effect upon the Baron de Virmeux, he seem pleased to listen to me, appearing surprised to hear me speak so well. I concluded that I was not mistaken in judging him to know very

little of my world. He could not imagine that a Mélinite would be able to show any mind, and to converse, when she chose, in much the same way as a baroness. He had, no doubt, until then, mixed, confounded, placed in the same class, all those women who sell their charms, from the street-walker, open to all at a fixed or reduced price, to the swell women of the highest notoriety. He was ignorant of the fact that when well launched and living in a certain style we only go with the very best class of foreigners or Parisians. Our associates supply us with all we require from the commencement of our career. From a moral standpoint we are all worth the same, I admit. But from any other view there is not the slightest resemblance between us. We are certainly colleagues, but in different degrees. Is it only a question of money? Not so. If that was all, men would indeed be foolish to give, for the same thing, to this one a louis . . . and I exaggerate in saying so . . . and to that one an establishment. The baron had never reflected in this manner, without doubt, from his astonishment in finding some mind, some good manners, in Mademoiselle Mélinite. I had taken it into my head to make them escort me to my house, and with them it was not an easy thing to do. After some slight hesitation, however,

they decided to accompany me. They called a carriage, and we entered it, after they had carefully looked around them. This informed me that the baron was married, and was afraid of being seen; the marquis, who I knew to be a wild boy, had no occasion to act in this way. This little discovery did not displease me; I like these obstacles, this resistance, for the pleasure of overcoming them.

“On our way from the Boulevard des Italiens to the Arc de Triomphe, near which I live, I endeavored to persuade them to take a little refreshment at my house. It is beautifully appointed, and I wanted to show it to the baron. They ended by accepting my invitation. I noticed, with great pleasure, that the baron yielded first. Certainly it is true that while seated near to him in the carriage I kept his hand in mine, and pressed against him with my knees, but very slightly, very innocently, as if by accident.

“We arrived. A domestic and my maid attended at the door. . . . Oh! my house is very well appointed. . . . I gave my orders; then I did the honors of my house, which was suddenly lit up with the electric light, to my guests. I read in the baron’s eyes, for he was too well bred to mention it, that his astonishment was still increased. No,

he could not imagine that a loose woman, . . . for that is doubtless the name that he would give me, . . . should live in this style, without false luxury, without too much show, in the midst of beautiful furniture and works of art. I could see at a glance that I was growing in importance in his eyes. I grew still more when we passed into the dining-room, furnished in old oak, where a cold supper was served. That is what I understand by a little refreshment at midnight.

“How if they should refuse to sit down? The marquis, always stubborn, thought of doing so, perhaps. But the baron, after having carefully looked at the time to know if he could, under pretense of being at the club, spare a few more minutes, took his place at my side. I rewarded him by my excessive amiability. He pleased me more and more, and I finished by getting excited, as it is called. He was excited also. It was very natural on his part; when an habitually wise man commits a folly, he does not do it by halves. Married men, when they are out, enjoy themselves more than bachelors. If one can amuse oneself at any time, it ceases to be an amusement.”

Ah! the wretch, the hussy! No one knows the horrible torture I endured. To think that my

husband should have fallen in love with such a vile creature !

“After supper,” she continued, gayly, “we returned into the salon. I employed all my charms. I know all the new songs, and I do not sing them badly. I detail them with much art. I accompany them with expressive looks and eloquent gestures. . . . Paulus has heard me and affirms that I could make my fortune in the concert halls. . . . However, I have no need of that, thanks to the baron. In short, when these gentlemen left, about three in the morning, they were quite infatuated with me—the baron even more so than the marquis.

“Before he left, the baron had promised to visit me, but the next day I waited uselessly for him.

“The day after, I waited again, with the same result. I commenced to grow impatient, I was more completely taken with him than I thought, and if he did not return he would escape me,—he, the only one who could make me change my opinion of the men, teach me to repent having disdained them until now.

“Eight days elapsed. At last I received a heavy letter. It contained ten notes of one thousand francs each, and the following words, which I shall never forget :

“ ‘ The Baron de Virmeux requests Mademoiselle Mélinite to receive him to-day, from four to six o’clock, and to accept the inclosed amount as a slight indemnity for the time that she will lose with him.’ ”

XXII.

JUDGING from her emotion, from her heightened color, when she told me the contents of this letter, one might have thought she had just received and read it. And the most curious part of it was that she expected me to take her part, to feel the imagined indignity as much as herself.

Seated facing me, with her arms extended, and her hands leaning upon the little table which separated us, she said to me, in a short, quick voice :

“I will make you the judge, madame. Was not the letter from the Baron de Virmeux most abominable? Had he the right to insult me in this manner, to treat me as a child; I who had just given him my best at my own house, honestly, yes, honestly? Should he not have judged me from what I had said, from what I done, from that which I had shown him. If I had received him in one of those little rooms, where, at the first glance at the place and its appointments, one can class the person who lives there, he could not have treated me worse. But I had opened to him my house, the house of a

woman of the world, and not of a common prostitute. Was it my conduct, my language, that showed my true position? No, certainly not. I had been amiable, too amiable, coquettish even. But if every coquettish woman is to be thought badly of, badly classed, I believe it would not be very difficult to count the remainder. Then, if appearances were not against me, if nothing in my conduct with him accused me, why did he send me money? Had I asked him for it? And this appointment, the object of which he clearly defines. Oh! there is no doubt on that point, it is plain. He mentions his hour, in broad daylight, before dinner. He thinks that all hours are the same to me; that I work at all hours of the day or night. ‘You will receive me from four to six. Two hours are enough with you. Be quite ready to love me. I pay you in advance, and I pay you royally, in order to be quickly served and not to be kept waiting. I am in a hurry. . . .’ ‘Well, sir, I am not in a hurry. Your majesty shall know it well. I do not wait. I will teach him. He shall wait for me, and that forever.’

“And this was the first man who had pleased me — whom I desired. Yes, I thought at last, that I had won the first prize at roulette, in this lottery of love, of which I spoke just now. Perhaps I

was mistaken, it might only have been the second or third prize. But I should have thought it the first, because one regards the man one loves in a light which exaggerates his worth, and can transform a dwarf into a giant, a Pygmy into Hercules. Yes, I should have taken him for a god, and he would perhaps have made me forget the goddesses to whom I have sacrificed until to-day. But now I will not change my worship, I will burn the same incense before the same idols, since the god whom I wished to serve insulted me, even before I knelt before him.

“Ah! what a service he has rendered me in treating me thus. What new strength I shall acquire. I have always feared to yield to the temptation of loving a man, of suffering for him. I fear no longer since I have resisted the seductions of that one, the only one, who might have seduced me. I know myself. My wounded pride, my first love insulted, will never pardon him, whatever may be my desires. It was he who could not resist me. No one can resist Mélinite. She does her work surely.

“And my interests, that I was forgetting?

“I am only a girl. Well, in our days, girls sometimes think of the future, prepare for their old age, or, without looking so far ahead, amass as

much money and in as short a time as possible, in order that they may live as they choose without the assistance of man. If I had been amorous with the baron, as I started to be, he would only have given me ten thousand francs and would have left me, saying: 'I wished to know one of these creatures. Now I know them. I have seen enough. I shall return no more.' Ah! Well, he did return, and often. I weighed the matter carefully. A man who, after resisting his caprice eight days, gives ten thousand francs to satisfy it, will give a hundred times as much if he cannot satisfy it, if I sharpen it, if I transform it into a passion, and, feeling certain that I was not mistaken, without hesitation, I wrote the following lines:

"'Mademoiselle Mélinite is at the orders of the Baron de Virmeux to-day, at the appointed time. But he does not know her motto: "Much or nothing." He can take his choice.'

"I put this letter into a fresh envelope. I inclosed the ten thousand francs, and I ordered my maid to give it to the baron when he presented himself at four o'clock. Then I waited, with firmness. With him I ran no risk. On receiving this letter a true Parisian would have placed the ten thousand francs in his pocket, would have come in, spent two hours with me, and have sent me in the

evening a bouquet with these words : ‘Thanks ; I have chosen.’ But the baron is a man of a more determined stamp. The ten thousand francs will increase. At a quarter past four my maid came to me and said :

“ ‘The baron has been here, madame.’

“ ‘You gave him my letter ?’

“ ‘Yes, and he went out immediately.’

“ ‘Was there any reply ?’

“ ‘He asked me to request madame to wait a little. He would return in a moment.’

“I had triumphed. Decided to satisfy his fancy, cost what it might, to end the matter, and not having a large amount upon him, he had gone to procure it.

“As a fact, twenty minutes had not past when he again presented himself. He was introduced into my boudoir, where I was awaiting him in a toilet put on for the occasion. He advanced a little awkwardly. Then placing a roll of paper upon the mantelpiece :

“ ‘Here,’ said he, ‘are fifty thousand francs in bonds, payable to bearer, which you can easily exchange for bank notes. I had not enough money at my house, and I feared I might keep you waiting.’

“ ‘Very well, baron,’ I replied, smiling, whilst,

with my eyes, I signed to him to take a place at my side."

She stopped and walked over to one of the windows opening upon the park, drawing her breath for one or two minutes . . . she had need to . . . and returning near me, for I had remained immovable, silent, she said to me :

"I shall not attempt, madame, to make you acquainted with all the phases of my *liason* with the Baron de Virmeux. It would be too long, too delicate, perhaps, to detail. I believe I have already indicated to you the plan that I followed : to caress, to flatter the mania of the baron, and not to yield to him ; to change this mania into a fixed desire ; to lead him on, little by little, until he was nearly out of his senses when near me, while I kept my own. In short, to whet, to increase his desire without satisfying him. But always letting him fondle me ; in fact, letting him travel half the road, in the hope of soon reaching the other half — of reaching his aim. Every time he met me he brought more bills, more bonds. I had told him graciously, once for all, not to take the trouble of turning them into money. . . .

"‘Bank notes,’ I said, ‘are too easily disposed of. I prefer the bonds that I can keep in memory of you.’ It is necessary with men to show a little

sentiment. They like it, and it assists to attach them to you.

“I do not believe, however, that the baron ever had any attachment for me. I understood, although he never told me so, that he had in his heart a profound affection, a serious love. Then why did he seek after me? It is very simple. The curiosity of a man who has not lived much — of an innocent — as I have judged him, notwithstanding his high intelligence. I was made of another substance, of different flesh, than the women of his world, than his wife, do doubt.

“He believed that the priestesses of love had something practical to show him that he could not learn at home. The very wisest men are liable, at some moment in their lives, to a foolish fit. But the fit in his case had failed. Then his self love came in, his anger followed, together with an invincible desire to triumph — not to allow a girl like myself to play with a man like him. Perhaps, also, why not? the desire of getting some return for his money, not for the sake of the money, he was too great a gentleman, but the vexation of telling himself he had given it for nothing, and with the infatuation of a gambler, who risks a million in order to gain ten thousand francs. This is what, I believe, passed through his mind, and

nothing else. No, he never loved me ! He was simply curious, desirous of me. He was infatuated, infatuated to the last degree. If I had said to him : ‘ You shall have me, at last, you shall have me ! ’ he would have consented to anything. I could have done with him what I pleased. Ah ! I had no necessity to promise him anything. The fear of seeing my door closed against him, of being obliged to leave humiliated and inflamed, without attaining his desire, made him humble and submissive. I, the maid, I made this grand gentleman serve me, whom I had taken for a king, and who, perhaps, is a prince. I mocked this man of mind. I believe that I dared one day to insult him, to strike him. He came back the next day, only he brought me the remainder of the million, one hundred thousand francs, in various bonds. ‘ It is finished,’ he said to me ; ‘ I cannot, must not go beyond this.’ He had fought the last fight, and had been beaten as usual. Then he went out, and has never returned.

“ I have often asked myself since if he may not have killed himself. Nothing is impossible. One man has already killed himself for me. I am not called Mélinite for nothing. But when I last met the Marquis de B. I asked him :

“ ‘ What has become of the Baron de Virmeux ? ’

“He answered : ‘He lives no more in Paris. He has returned home.’

“‘Is it far?’

“‘Oh ! very far!’ And he turned his back on me. He knew, no doubt, that I had received a million from his friend, and perhaps ruined him.

“That, madame, is the history of my liaison with the Baron de Virmeux. My fortune was made. I have lived since as it suited my fancy, following my own desires.”

At these last words I rose and left the salon to escape this miserable creature, from whom I had no more to learn.

XXIII.

WHAT has been her hope then, in relating this sad history to me? That I should admire her frankness, her cynicism, and that I should keep her near me? That, having become her confidante, I should not dare to send her away? She is very much mistaken! I would dismiss her, even if the Baron de Virmeux had been nothing to me.

But his name was the Duke de X., he was my husband. Ought it to suffice me then, to content myself with merely sending away the woman who killed him?

For I doubt it no more, she killed him, and in a slow and most cowardly fashion. He died from the shame of loving her, from the despair of desiring and not being able to possess her. Yes, from that passion that she aroused in him, and which he never lost.

He had said to himself: "I shall return there, perhaps, and debase myself still more. I shall end by ruining my wife. It is better to die." And he laid himself down to die, hoping that his illness,

the fever, would carry him off ; that he would die gently, without noise, as he had lived, a gentleman; that he would carry with him the secret he had kept so well. But death did not come quickly enough, and in his delirium he cut short his sufferings, his shame, and his fears, he . . . killed himself. This is doubtless the truth, and now that time has cooled my anger, and only my grief remains, I pardon him, his heart was always mine, as she has divined.

What has she not divined ? This fit of unhealthy curiosity was the only mistake he made in his otherwise perfect life, and he may be excused that. The duration of this fit may be explained also, as she explained it. Of what use to me is my knowledge of the world if I show a narrow and severe spirit, if I refuse to make due allowance for certain human weaknesses, if I do not know how to pardon them.

But I will not pardon the cruelty of this robber. Yes, a robber, for she stole this million ; it was a premeditated crime. I pardon her the pain which I have suffered, but I will never pardon the evil she did to my husband, whom I loved so well. And my pardon, what is there in the word, it signifies nothing. What does my pardon matter to her ? Will she do less harm because I refuse to

pardon her? She mocks at my hatred. What can I do to her? How can I strike at her? She entered my service, she tells me, to know a great lady. She knows one now, and can depart satisfied.

When I think she has not gone yet, that she is still under my roof, in the house in which *he* lived so long —— However she is going — she is going at last.

I rang the bell, I asked for my steward, and gave him my orders on the subject of Louise Bauquet. Then I went out — I wanted to walk — to breathe a little fresh air.

For two hours I walked in the park. When I returned my mind was just as fevered, my heart as troubled. When two people walk together it changes their ideas. One is obliged to listen, to reply to the other. Anything helps to turn one's thoughts from the subject that haunts one. It is a relief to tell a secret, to take counsel, to weep, and one returns calmed in spirit. But a solitary walk brings no solace. The brain is over excited with continually thinking of one subject. Bodily fatigue has no effect upon it. Does not an idiot continually walk backward and forward without losing the fixed idea he has in his brain. The imperative, absorbing thought, which I took out



P. 206.—A QUARTER OF AN HOUR AFTERWARD, WHEN I REACHED
THE FOOT OF THE CLIFF, SHE WAS DEAD.

with me, and which I have brought back again, is, to avenge my husband.

However, I was very angry on learning that Louise Bauquet had not left the house yet. I ought, on the contrary, to have been well pleased. If she had gone I should have had no opportunity to revenge myself upon her.

“Why have you not followed my instructions?” I asked my steward.

“I have followed them, madame the duchess. I gave Louise Bauquet your orders, but she said that the first train for Paris did not leave until midnight, and she asked permission to wait here.”

“She could have waited in a hotel at Boulogne. However, she is in her own room, I suppose?”

“Yes, madame; I believe she is packing her trunks.”

I dined at my usual hour, or rather, I seated myself at the table, for I could not eat. Then I went out again into the park, with my mind always fixed on the same idea.

Toward half-past eight, as I was returning, all at once, on turning a corner, I perceived Louise Bauquet. She advanced toward me, very quickly. I turned back to escape from her, but she caught me up, and said :

“Madame, I beseech you to listen to me.”

This apparition in the twilight, her rapid step, the tone of her voice, slightly frightened me ; however, I did not show it, and replied :

“What do you want ?”

“I wish, madame, to ask you not to require me to depart immediately. It is not just to discharge me in this manner. No, it is not just ! What have I done to deserve it ? You wished to know my life. I told it to you frankly, truly, without keeping anything back. It would have been easy for me to have shown myself better than I am. To have appeared different, to have hidden from you events that I told you of, and which even M. de Blazac does not know. My confession has been complete.”

“Because you were proud of what you had done,” said I, interrupting her in a voice as nervous as her own. “You wished to dazzle me by the recital of your exploits, to force me to admire your skill, your wickedness, your knowledge of men, to show me what you could make them do, to what point you could take them, even to folly, to despair, to death.”

“No, I told you all my faults in order to prove to you, at the same time, my desire to expiate them.”

“Expiate them, if your conscience tells you to

do so, but not here. My house is not an asylum for bad women to repent in. Return to Madame de la Bère. You both appear to me to be made for each other, to understand each other."

She raised her head suddenly, and said :

"You know our connection then ! You understand it ?

"Understand what ?"

"That we were lovers."

"You did not tell me that ?"

"No, I did not dare."

"Why not ? What is more simple ! You were her maid. But your million brought you closer to her, and friendship has gradually replaced respect."

"Oh ! friendship between females is rare. Love only can exist."

"Love ! How can one woman love another ! You are decidedly mad."

I had said these words without attaching much importance to them, without believing in her folly, but a moment after saying them I recoiled, frightened ; her eyes shone in the darkness that now surrounded us, she looked at me intently, her head, her bust leaning toward me, her bosom heaving and panting.

I turned to escape from her. She seized my

hands and held them nervously, keeping me in the same place. Then, leaning closer still, her breath literally burning, she cried :

“No ; I am not mad ! Why should not one woman love another ? Why should man alone have the privilege of being loved by us ? Are they worthy of women ? Do they deserve their devotion, their sacrifices, their immolation ? What return do they make, after satisfying their gross material passion ? Some, fine words, or some, money. They think too much of themselves, they are too egotistical to do anything more ! All that we give them is their right. In fact, in their minds, we give them nothing. We simply pay the tribute due to them. They are our kings, the lords of creation. Mistaken creatures, they only really reign as long as we let them, as long as we lead them by the hand and prevent them from slipping, from falling. Can they see the dangers of the road ? No ; they hold themselves above that. Do they trouble themselves with the worries, the difficulties of their daily life ? No ; that is our affair. They amuse themselves, or work, as they please ; they gather the flowers we have planted. What do they give us ? Children ! that, to some, is a source of disgrace, an evidence of dishonor, and who cause us all great suffering. As to giving us any pleasure, nonsense !

When they are young they only think of themselves, and know nothing better. When older, they think of us sometimes, but know very little more about us. It is not their fault, for they only know us from hearsay. We, alone, know and understand ourselves."

I made another effort to release my wrists, but she held them so firmly I could not succeed ; then I cried :

"Let me go, or I will call for assistance."

"You may call. What do I care ? I must go in an hour. Your servants cannot treat me more shamefully than they have done. But before they come I will tell you why I entered your service ; why I made myself your servant, your slave ; why I implore you to keep me with you. . . . The reason is, because I love you as I have never loved. . . . I adore you ! Oh ! do not let me frighten you. I think you the most beautiful of God's creatures. You are not merely a woman, you are a magnificent goddess. I would give the whole world to freely kiss your feet and knees. But I also adore you for your mind, your superior intelligence, your virtue, and even for your coldness and scorn. It is not love alone that I feel for you, but I worship you. I will consent to serve you all my life, kneeling at your feet, without touching you.

I have been dying to tell you all this, and I have never dared. You see how much I respect you. If I tell you this to-day it is because I am mad, yes, mad with pain at the idea of leaving you, of seeing you no more, of never hearing you, of living no more in your life. Have pity on me ; for God's sake, have pity. Do not send me away !”

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It was true then ! I could no longer allow myself to doubt this monstrous thing, of which I should never have dared to think, notwithstanding my surprise at some of her expressions. One woman to be able to have a passion for another woman ! And I the one who has inspired this sacrilegious love !

This time I made such an effort that I disengaged myself from her, I was able to escape. She dared not touch me again, and remained silent, immovable, cringing beneath my anger, that I showed her plainly. But I did not turn away ; an idea, outrageous, monstrous as her passion, had struck my mind. I tried to drive it from me, to dismiss it, but it was too strong for me. For several hours my mind had been full of the same thought : to avenge my husband, to avenge him ! I was becoming as mad as she was. . . .

Suddenly, in my fevered state, I cried :

“What did you give the Baron de Virmeux in return for all that he gave to you?”

“Nothing.”

“Then, when he brought you twenty or fifty thousand francs, he simply paid you for your hospitality, for the hours he passed in your house?”

“Yes, but I do not understand . . .”

“If,” I continued, “two or three hours near Mademoiselle Mélinite are worth fifty thousand francs, how much is a week worth passed near the Duchess de X.? Calculate it yourself, after you have taken into consideration the social position of of both. It must be obvious that a woman like myself ought to be worth more than a woman like you. If I demand a hundred thousand francs, would it be asking too much?”

“A hundred thousand francs for what?”

“For nothing, as was the case with the baron of whom you were speaking.”

“Then I shall resume my service with you?”

“Yes.”

“And after the week?”

“You will be at liberty to go or to pay another hundred thousand francs for another week. You will thus be able to remain until the winter.”

She attempted to discover, to read in my eyes,

if I was speaking seriously or if I was only mocking her. But it was too dark. Then she said :

“You intend to give this sum to the poor, no doubt, madame ?”

“That does not concern you. . . . If you hesitate, imagine that I have not spoken.”

“I do not hesitate. I accept. I will place in your hands this evening, madame, bonds to the amount of one hundred thousand francs.”

“You have them with you ? You travel with them, then ?”

“It is more prudent than leaving them in Paris.”

“Very well.”

I walked in the direction of the house, without another word, and she walked by my side, also silent. She still hesitated. I understood it. It was hard to give up a fortune so painfully acquired. It was true, no doubt, that she was only giving me a tenth part, and that she hoped, at the end of the first week, to remain near me without paying any more. She might have even thought that, touched by her love, understanding it better, sympathizing with it, I should ask her to remain ; I should pay her in my turn. In truth, how could she believe that, in my situation, with my fortune, I should seriously think of taking her money. To have reasoned otherwise she must have known the bond

of union between the baron and myself, to have divined that I had only one thought, to avenge him, to punish her. And that, for want of a better commencement, I was taking from her the money which was the reward of her cupidity.

Later on I shall see what more to do ; for she not only robbed him, but she killed him, . . . and the law punishes a murderer with death.

27th July.

About ten o'clock this evening she entered my bedroom, to which I had retired to write the preceding pages. She held in her hand a large envelope, which she tendered me. I said :

“What is this ?”

“The hundred thousand francs.”

“Place it upon the table, and leave me. You may re-commence your duties to-morrow morning.”

She retired without answering. Mélinite has become again Louise Bauquet.

Left alone, I went over to the mantel, took up the envelope and opened it. It contained some of the bonds inscribed in our marriage contract, and of the disappearance of which my notary had informed me. They were returned to me, rumpled by the hand of this girl, sullied by her touch.

Oh ! never again shall she have the opportunity of touching these papers that have been in the hands of my husband. They are lost to her forever. But they shall not be lost to all.

The next morning I went into town to see Doctor Filliette, an amiable and talented man, who attends upon me when I am at the "Ruins," and who not only attends to the people of Boulogne when they are ill, but interests himself in them and cares for them in many ways.

"You here, duchess, at my house !" he said ;
"why did you not send for me ?"

"Because I do not require any medicine. I have come to see you as the municipal councilor, one of the authorities of our country."

"A very modest authority. What can I do for you, duchess ?"

"I wish to ask you, dear doctor and councilor, to give me some particulars of the terrible disaster of the 14th October last. You will still be able to recall it to your memory."

"That I certainly can, for I never remember a worse one. The whole fleet of fishing-boats was lost in the North Sea, between the coasts of England and Holland."

"Boulogne and Portel suffered the most, was it not so ?"

“Yes, we lost twelve vessels, six from Boulogne, and six from Portel.”

“How many fishermen were on board of them?”

“Nearly two hundred and fifty; from eighteen to twenty men and two boys in each boat. Not one of them was saved.”

“It made many widows and orphans, then?”

“Alas, yes.”

“Has much money been subscribed to alleviate their distress?”

“Very little without your assistance, madame, which you appear to have forgotten . . .”

“Let that pass, dear doctor, if you wish to oblige me, and let us speak of the future. One of my friends has placed in my hands one hundred thousand francs to be expended in some good work. There is no better one than rendering assistance to these widows, to all these children, and I ask you to divide this amount among them. But my friend wishes his name to remain unknown.”

“I will not mention your name, duchess.”

“This is what I feared. You are mistaken. I swear to you that this is not my money, and it will cause me much annoyance if my name is mentioned in connection with it.”

"You are placing me in a serious difficulty, madame. I cannot distribute this money myself. I must consult the mayor and my colleagues in the council. Everyone will wish to know the name of the donor."

"Then, if it is absolutely necessary you may mention it privately. He is named the Baron de Virmeux. You are now satisfied. In exchange I ask you to give me your word of honor not to speak of me. The widows and orphans will wish to pray for the baron, and I do not deserve to be mixed up in these prayers."

"I give you my word, duchess."

"Thank you. Come and see me some day at the 'Ruins.' I shall have something more to give you."

"From your friend as before."

"Yes ; he is receiving, gradually, a large amount that was taken from him, and as he does not require it, he is distributing it among the unfortunate."

After leaving Doctor Filliette I returned to Portel, and rang for Louise Bauquet. She has resumed her duties, as I promised her.

XXIV.

27th September.

FOR two months I have written nothing in my journal.

Why?

I have had nothing to write about. Nothing of any interest to mention.

Is this the truth, the sincere reason? I am not writing the history of my time, the history of others. I am writing my own little history, and it has been during this time very quiet and uneventful. But at other times when events have been absent I have replaced them by my thoughts, by my impressions, my sensations during the day. Have I then felt nothing, experienced nothing since the end of last July? Can I dare to say so, to lie in this way to myself? No. Then, why this long silence, these blank pages?

I will venture to answer this question. I have not had courage to examine my conscience. I have been frightened at the thought of finding myself too culpable, of discovering too many sins; not sins which are apparent to the eyes, which

make one blush, which endanger the soul, and which, in order to satisfy remorse, it is necessary to confess, in order to obtain pardon, but latent, passive sins, if I may call them so, of which it is not possible to give a truthful account until some time after they are committed, when the imagination, the true culprit, is less excited.

The imagination ! Have I prevented my own from misleading me during these two months ; and when I say that it was the only culprit, am I speaking the truth ? Ought I not to have foreseen that it would fatally mislead me, that I should be no longer its mistress. Why did I launch myself into a stupid adventure, or dream of a mad revenge ? Should an honest woman do these things ? Does the end that I wished to attain, the idea I pursued, absolve me ? Does the result obtained justify the means I employed ? But, if I have sinned in thought, if my head has become heated at certain hours, if curiosity has at times beset me, if, perhaps, *desire* . . . yes, I dare confess it . . . has for one moment mounted to my brain, my alarm has been immediate, my revolt instantaneous. My will has silenced my imagination. Would my will have been as triumphant under other conditions ? I ought to ask myself this question and to reply to it, though the

question may be indiscreet, the answer delicate. I shall do it nevertheless ; if, in place of finding myself in this situation with a woman I hate, and on whom I wish to be revenged, I had been placed in the same position for as long a time with some other woman who was infatuated in the same way ; if, in a word, Louise Bauquet, in place of being Mélinite, had merely been Louise Bauquet, what would have happened ?

This is an absurd question. I cannot answer it. It is only the enervating life which I am leading, continued for a very long time, that could triumph over my will, could conquer me, could lead me to abase myself, and I shall never expose myself to such a danger. It is said that the woman who no one tries to seduce has no merit in remaining virtuous. This is a mistake. If they are not attacked, it is because they give no one the opportunity. She who prudently flies from the enemy, is fulfilling the first duty of an honest woman, and is not tempted by the devil. If this idea of vengeance had not taken possession of me, I most certainly would not have tempted either the great devil that inhabits the body of Louise Bauquet or the little devil that perhaps inhabits my own.

Am I well revenged ? I believe so. At any rate, I have tried to inflict upon her every torment

that she made my husband suffer. I have applied the doctrine of retaliation to her in all its rigor, although with some necessary modifications. The duke remained upon the road, she dared to say, because he was too fatigued to continue upon it. But I, who have a better opinion of women's nerves, and know their powers of resisting fatigue, have never permitted her to start upon that road. When I became aware that she had given up the idea of that road, and was trying to stray into another path, a private path, I kept a good watch upon the entrance to that path. If sometimes she has been permitted to kiss the feet of her idol, that idol has disappeared from her gaze, when her kisses threatened to rise from the feet to the knees.

And has she been contented with these joys, so long waited for, so rare, and so limited? Yes; because she has always been hoping to pass the limit, as the Baron de Virmeux hoped. And for such a small satisfaction she has sacrificed every week a new portion of her fortune? Yes, as the baron did, from infatuation, in the fear of losing what she had previously given, feeling certain of a final triumph, made obstinate from a series of failures. Then she has said to herself: "When I have conquered, my million will return in one

sum, increased by interest, perhaps doubled." She thinks this money is safely kept by me, and does not suspect that it goes to Boulogne and is being gradually distributed among the widows and orphans of the shipwrecked fishermen.

Perhaps she does not make all these calculations, perhaps I am too severe upon her. But these severities are imposed upon me; if I do not continue to think of her as a contemptible woman, I shall be led away in a moment to pity her, to be sorry for her. She appears to love me so much, and this love, as a rule, is so free from all bad thoughts! A friend, a sister, notwithstanding her affection, could never arrive at this absolute devotion, this immolation of herself for another. But I must not be lenient to her; has she not avowed that she lured on my husband. How? By caresses, without doubt. For myself, I do not go beyond coquetry, and that is sufficient. When I speak to her she listens to me, and, I might almost say, drinks in my words, whilst I can read in her eyes that desire which she will never be able to satisfy. I adorn myself for her, and it is she who embellishes me, and increases her torment. Every day a new coiffure that she has dreamt of, and that she dresses slowly with her caressing fingers. After doing my hair, then comes the toilet, for she has

retaken all her duties as a maid. I allow her to do everything. She pays enough, one hundred thousand francs a week, for the right to dress and undress me. She is rather slow sometimes in pulling up my under petticoat, or clasping my corsage. Active as she was at the start, she has really become too contemplative. I have patience, however, I allow her to contemplate. But she reads in my eyes, in all our musings : "Touching is prohibited."

I have not diminished her services ; at her request I have augmented them. She is present now, in my temple, when I take my bath. She remains immovable, not behind me, as she did on a previous occasion, but at my feet, at the other end of the black marble shell. She gazes at me intently, and I sometimes suspect her of hoping I may become sleepy, or of wishing she could mesmerize and impose her will upon me. But I defy her. Her looks have no effect upon me. They want authority ; a slave cannot make her mistress sleep. It is I, rather, that will make her sleep, will dictate to her my orders. But to what purpose ? Wide awake, she does everything. She divines my orders before I give them to her, even better than she used to do. After a good deal of hesitation I ended by allowing her to undertake her office of masseuse again. But no more in

thundery weather, in a dim light, amidst the scent of flowers and perfumes. Not as in the commencement, when I did not mistrust her. If she appears sleepy now, as on a certain occasion, I awake her with hard words. One day I struck her. Did she not tell me she had dared to strike the Baron de Virmeux? Yet, like the baron, she did not murmur; submissive, subdued, she continued her massage. A massage this time full of respect.

This is what has occurred during the last two months, neither more nor less. Ah, well! I have just read again this examination of my conscience, and I understand why I hesitated to make it. Ah! it is better to write the record of one's life every day. It makes it easier to discern one's faults. They appear very small in one's thoughts, but on paper they assume their true proportions. They appear plainly such as they are, without disguise.

Yes, under the pretext of vengeance, believing I was obeying a good sentiment, I have committed some pitiful actions unworthy of me. Is it not shameful to take money from a girl, even to distribute it among the poor? This million belonged to her, since it was given to her. The duke never dreamt of taking it from her; no, certainly not. Then why have I done so?

And as to this other way of avenging my husband — by inflicting torments upon this girl, similar to those which he endured from her — I reproach myself for it; I blush for it. I will never forgive myself for doing this. But, above all, I will do it no more. My vengeance shall remain unfinished. I will do more. I cannot return the same bonds to this woman, for they are already divided among the poor, but I will give her back an equal sum.

Very good. But now, after all this time passed at my side, all this long, enervating intimacy, that has only increased her folly, how can I induce her to leave me? For she can not remain, that is certain? It is impossible. It is impossible. What prayers will she address me with! What despair! I do not wish to be a witness to it. Then I must tell someone else to inform her, as on the first occasion. It is too hard; besides, she knows so well what to reply to me, how to supplicate me. Shall I write to her? No, I cannot compromise myself to that extent. I see only one way, to depart immediately, without her knowing it, without saying where I am going. Will she not discover my retreat? What shall I do? I must go away and think, reflect . . . far from her.

XXV.

2nd October.

I HAVE not been able to summon up enough courage, before to-day, to write in my journal the termination of this sad adventure.

The night found me still in the park thinking how I might induce Louise Bauquet to leave me, to separate herself from me forever. A strong wind had come up from the west, and cleared the sky. It was cold, and I should have returned, for I was lightly clad. However, I remained outside, being fearful of meeting her whom I wished to discharge, and yet unable to decide what to say to her. The idea came into my head to take shelter in the ruins of the old chateau. No one would dream of looking for me there; I could reflect at my ease, determine what course to pursue before again meeting Louise Bauquet. Last year the duke had half restored one of the rooms in this ancient building, the chamber that had been inhabited, it was said, by the beautiful Marie, Abbess of Ramsay, after her abduction and before her marriage. Some worn-out, tottering steps lead

up to this room. I am safe upon them, because I know them well, and know where to place my feet. I ascended and entered the chamber. The walls are strengtened with bars of iron ; some new beams, roughly put up, served as a ceiling. I crossed to the window, or, rather, to a large gap in the wall, formerly closed with a window. There before me was an abyss from twenty to thirty metres in depth, for the building was now, owing to the enroachments of the sea, right on the edge of the cliff.

Seated upon a garden-chair, that had previously been placed there, I thought for some time, and finally made up my mind that I would speak to Louise Bauquet myself, gently and kindly. That I would try to make her listen to reason, to inspire her with a strong resolution, to persuade her to leave, both for her own sake and mine also.

After having made up my mind, I was about to return to finish the matter the same evening. But when, after having crossed the room, I placed my foot upon the first step of the ladder, I perceived that someone was coming up, I felt frightened, and cried :

“Who is there ? Who is that ?”

“It is I, madame the duchess,” a voice replied.

“I was uneasy at your absence, and have been seeking for you everywhere.”

At the same time Louise Bauquet joined me. I could not help saying :

“What folly for you to venture at night among these ruins !”

“But,” she said, “the night is so clear, I can see plainly ; besides, I know this room. I am aware that unless one wishes to kill oneself, one must be careful in mounting these steps. But death is simply an idea like any other.”

“What do you mean ? Why talk of death ?”

“It is this precipice, this gulf, that makes me speak of it. As a rule I never think of it. It will come when it pleases, either to-day, to-morrow, or later on. It makes very little difference to me. My life is a useless one.”

By instinct, by an intuition, which does not surprise me, she always reads my thoughts. She knows beforehand that I wish to give her good advice. However, I said to her :

“If you are discontented with your life, why do you not change it ? Render it useful, profitable to others, make it an honest one.”

“I, Mélinite !”

“No, you, Louise Bauquet. You told me that you have a married sister, who is not well off or

happy. Go and live near her, occupy yourself with her children, love them, look after them, take care of them."

"Take care of them! How can I? I have nothing."

"There is your million!"

"My million?"

"Yes. You do not think, I imagine, that I am going to keep it. I have employed it, in good works, in the name of the Baron de Virmeux . . . in order that he may forgive you. But on your return to Paris, I shall place in your hands other bonds, representing the amount I received from you."

Instead of looking pleased at this good news, she contented herself with saying:

"If you are going to return me this money, why did you take it?"

"To prove you, to find out if you were as selfish as you appeared to be, as you had been with the baron."

"Well! you have learned nothing. A woman studies her own interests when she does not love. She neglects and forgets them near the person she loves."

"You are mistaken. I have learned something. You are worth better things than you believe. It

is for that reason I wish you to pursue another career."

"This one suits me. I do not wish to change it."

"Which one do you speak of? That of Mélinite or that of Louise Bauquet?"

"That of Louise Bauquet, your maid."

"You know very well you cannot always remain in my service."

"Ah! you are going to send me away! again!"

"I do not send you away. I speak to your reason, your judgment, and ask you to leave me of your own accord, to go away."

"Ah! I knew it well; I knew it well! When I saw you take up your journal to-day . . . Oh! that journal! . . . you wrote—you wrote a long time, then went out without allowing me to follow you, to enter these ruins, and I said to myself: 'She is turning over some new project in her head; she has some dreadful design against me.'"

"No," I answered, trying to calm her; "it is not a dreadful design, since I have been thinking, on the contrary, how I could make your life a happy one. But let us see: It is now the end of September. It is already late for the seaside. I must soon return to Paris. Can I take you with me, or keep you near me, you are so well known?"

“Oh ! I can disguise myself. I can transform myself so that no one will know me.”

“Madame de la Bère knows that you are in my service.”

“She cannot speak of it. She left Paris on the evening of my departure to join a very rich American in the United States, and she will not return. Besides which, if by any possible chance she should ever mention it, you will say what you have certainly already thought of saying : ‘I did not know that Louise Bauquet was named Mélinite.’ I have always passed as a true lady’s maid, which is the reason I have always received good testimonials.”

“But Blazac ? Has he not learned that Louise Bauquet and Mélinite are one and the same person ?”

“Oh ! Blazac is no more to be feared. I have heard of him. He is living at Boulogne in the Hotel Chrystol with a little brunette who I know well, her name is Rose Miron. She is an explosive for men like himself, and the feeble Blazac, led astray as he is, will not be long before he will repent having studied too closely this new explosive. That will be the end of Blazac.”

This language, which sounded worse than usual, and recalled the old Mélinite, this light way of speaking of a man to whom, in reality, she owed

her fortune, disgusted me. I should have taken into account her nervousness, natural enough at this moment. But I have nerves myself; and I was becoming irritated at seeing that I made no progress in her mind; that I could neither convince her, nor even make her hesitate. So I said, shortly :

“It is useless to discuss this matter longer. We must separate.”

“Why?”

“If you are really attached to me, devoted to me, you must already understand why.”

“I only understand one thing: it is that I do not wish to leave you.”

“You should have courage, have reflection.”

“Foolish people cannot reflect, and I am foolish . . . about you.”

“All the more reason why I should require you to leave. What do you hope for?”

“That you will end by loving me as I love you.”

“Never! I could not do it.”

“Tell me why.”

“Because a woman honestly brought up, whose mind is pure, whose heart is in the right place, can neither understand, admit, or participate in certain sentiments that are unnatural, if one may call your ideas sentiments. When you express them,

instead of pleasing us, of inflaming our passions, as you believe, you only inspire us with repulsion. We are not made for your depravity ; it revolts us. Your corruptions sicken us. Most of us do not even understand the meaning of them. The remainder, who have learned of them by some chance, perhaps, consider you to be mad, and keep you at a distance. Not that they fear to catch your complaint, but simply because you are repugnant to them. Your vice is known to them, they have divined it ; but they do not allow the thought of it to remain in their minds. You exist, they know it ; but you do not exist for them. This is not simple honesty, it is instinct. Yes, an instinctive aversion for that which is not natural."

"Then," she said, "I have never inspired you with any feeling but repulsion !"

"Yourself, no. Your love, yes."

"It is very deep, however. It fills my heart."

"If it was only your heart !"

"I will hide the remainder. I swear it. Only keep me near you."

"I tell you that it is impossible."

"Do the impossible. I love you so much. Ah ! If you knew ! I think only of you. I dream about you when I am asleep. But, alas ! I cannot sleep now. Thinking of you keeps me awake. Do

you not notice how I am changed ? My eyes stand out in my thin face. I know it ; I often look at myself. I am afraid of becoming ugly, or, rather, that you will find me so. The last three months passed near you has completed the mischief. Why did you not send me away the first time ? Why did you yield to my prayers ? It is too late now ; you have no longer the right to send me away. I shall die away from you ; yes, I shall die. . . . Have pity. . . . For heaven's sake, have pity."

Leaning toward me, almost kneeling, she seized my hands, kissing them, and I felt her tears running through my fingers.

Her grief was terrible, and yet at the same time I felt furious with myself, for this grief, I had wished for it, I had sought it. It should have made me rejoice, and on the contrary, it caused me great suffering. . . . Ah ! it was too much to forget my dream of vengeance ! Had not my husband suffered as she did, for her ! Why did I think of him at this moment ? But she continued to press me without ceasing. Desperate, she cried to me :

"Love me ; for mercy's sake, love me . . . "

Then, not knowing what to say, what to do, and decided, notwithstanding, to take from her all

hope, I placed my hands upon her shoulders, and looking her full in the face, I said to her :

“The true name of the Baron de Virmeux was the Duke de X. . . . He was my husband !”

“Ah !” she cried, instantly recoiling, “you wished to avenge him !”

“Yes, but I wish it no longer.”

Struck with another idea, she then said :

“You are a widow. . . . How did he die ?”

“He killed himself for your sake.”

“For my sake ! Ah ! my God ! Ah ! my God ! . . . I understand now. I understand it all. . . . It is true, you could not love me ! No, you could not !”

She staggered up and down the room, repeating in a hoarse voice, as if she was choking : “No, no, she cannot love me ; she cannot !”

For one moment she stopped, and also said : “He is dead. He killed himself for me !”

Then, suddenly, she added : “Then I will kill myself for her !”

And, rushing to the window, she threw herself into the abyss.

A quarter of an hour afterward, when I reached the foot of the cliff, she was dead . . . dead, without pain. Her head and body were broken upon the rocks on the shore.

This death has been attributed to accident. My servants had remarked that Mademoiselle Bauquet loved to walk after dark, in these ruins, and one of them had said : "She is wrong. Some harm will happen to her. The chamber of the abbess is very dangerous."

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She was buried yesterday. The service took place in the little church at Portel. I covered her coffin with all the late autumn flowers that we could find in the park and meadows. I walked behind it from the "Ruins" to the place of burial, followed by the whole of my household, together with the women from Portel, and some few of the fishermen who were not at sea.

On my return to Paris I charged my notary to seek out the sister of Louise Bauquet, and to make over to her a million francs, in rentes and bonds, inscribed in the names of herself and her children.

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The Prince de T., it is stated, was married last year to the Duchess de X.

The reader of the private journal, which had been confided to him, of the complete confession contained in it, no doubt felt somewhat uncertain as to whether the duchess, having gone so far,

would, after having had her curiosity excited to such a degree, be always able to restrain it. He certainly asked himself, notwithstanding her honesty, her strength of character, her instinctive repugnance, if, later on, some evil day, under new and unknown conditions, she would not be tempted to know more on this subject.

But as he had very advanced ideas upon the subject of love between married people, perhaps he said to himself, at the same time: "If it is necessary to instruct her to the very end, I will instruct her myself."

In this kind of education a man is even superior to a woman — he can teach all that a woman can teach, and a great deal that she can never teach. The Maupin, the demoiselles, Giraud and the Mélinites are only truly dangerous to the man who respects his wife more than she wishes to be respected, and who does not wish, or who does not know how, to be her lover after he has become her husband.

The Prince de T. evidently wished, for some good reason, to espouse his beautiful penitent, or he might have spoken in another way. He might have said: "It lowers, it degrades a legitimate wife to initiate her into all the secrets, all the refinements of love. It also exposes her to grave

dangers—one curiosity satisfied provokes a new one, or the same under a different form.”

The female imagination, when once it has taken flight, never knows when to stop. The professor cries to his pupil: “I have told you all. Be satisfied, then;” she does not believe it, and though there is nothing more to teach her, she continues to search for what does not exist.

Then, should not the man, bent upon marriage, rather seek for one of those women . . . and there are many . . . more honest than curious. And when he has found one let him be contented with being a true husband, honestly loving, even passionate . . . passion is not excluded from the programme . . . and do his best to enable her to present him with sound, healthy children, who are the best safeguards from a Mélinite—a species which is equally dangerous to both sexes.

THE END.

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